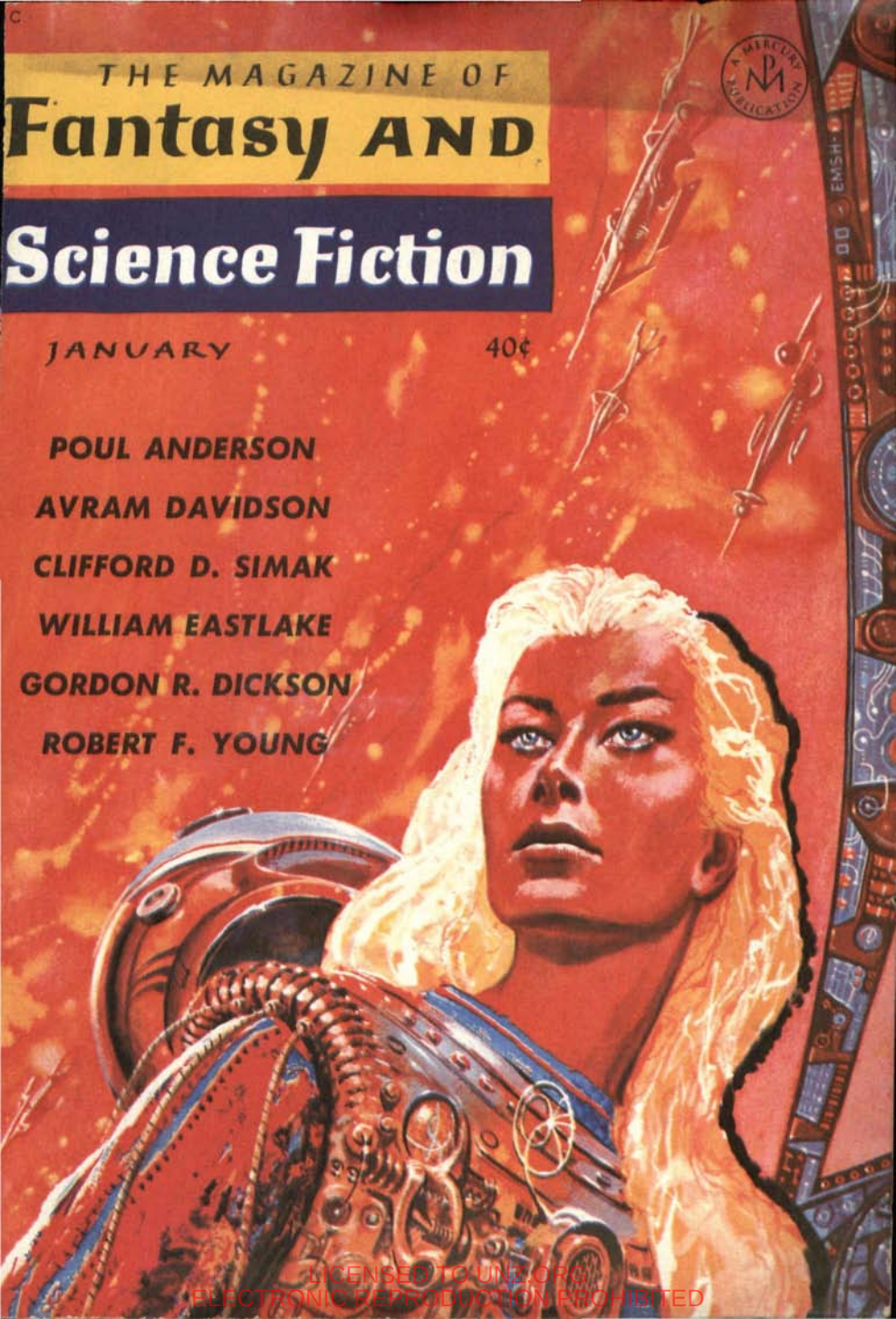

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Fantasy and Science Fiction

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THE SOURCES OF THE NILE

by Avram Davidson

IT WAS IN THE RUTHERFORD office on Lexington that Bob Rosen met Peter ("Old Pete"—"Sneaky Pete"—"Poor Pete": take your pick) Martens for the first and almost last time. One of those tall, cool buildings on Lexington with the tall, cool office girls it was; and because Bob felt quite sure he wasn't and damned well never was going to be tall or cool enough for him to mean anything to them, he was able to sit back and just enjoy the scenery. Even the magazines on the table were cool: Spectator, Botteghe Oscuro, and Journal of the New York State Geographical Society. He picked up the last and began to leaf through "Demographic Study of The Jackson Whites."

He was trying to make some sense out of a mass of statistics relating to albinism among that curious tribe (descended from Tuscorora Indians, Hessian deserters, London street women, and fugitive slaves), when one of the girls —delightfully tall, deliciously cool —came to usher him in to Tressling's office. He lay the magazine face down on the low table and followed her. The old man with the portfolio, who was the only other person waiting, got up just then, and Bob noticed the spot of blood in his eye as he passed by. They were prominent eyes, yellowed, reticulated with tiny red veins, and in the corner of one of them was a bright red blot. For a moment it made Rosen feel uneasy, but he had no time then to think about it.

"Delightful story," said Joe Tresling, referring to the piece which had gotten Rosen the interview, through his agent. The story had won first prize in a contest, and the agent had thought that Tressling . . . if Tressling . . . maybe Tressling . . .

"Of course, we can't touch it because of the theme," said Tressling.

"Why, what's wrong with the

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Civil War as a theme?" Rosen said.

Tressling smiled. "As far as Aunt Carrie's Country Cheese is concerned," he said, "the South *won* the Civil War. At least, it's not up to Us to tell Them differently. It might annoy Them. The North doesn't *care*. But write another story for us. The Aunt Carrie Hour is always on the lookout for new dramatic material."

"Like for instance?" Bob Rosen asked.

"What the great cheese-eating American public wants is a story of resolved conflict concerning young contemporary American couples earning over ten thousand dollars a year. But nothing sordid, controversial, outré, or passé."

Rosen was pleased to be able to see Joseph Tressling, who was the J. Oscar Rutherford Company's man in charge of scripts for the Aunt Carrie Hour. The *Mené Mené* of the short story was said that year to be on the wall, the magazines were dying like mayflies, and the sensible thing for anyone to do who hoped to make a living writing (he told himself) was to get into television. But he really didn't expect he was going to make the transition, and the realization that he didn't really know any contemporary Americans—young, old, married, single—who were earning over ten thousand dollars a year seemed to prophesy that he was never going to earn it himself.

"And nothing avant-garde," said Tressling.

The young woman returned and smiled a tall, cool smile at them. Tressling got up. So did Bob. "Mr. Martens is still outside," she murmured.

"Oh, I'm afraid I won't be able to see him today," said Joe Tressling. "Mr. Rosen has been so fascinating that the time seems to have run over, and then some. . . . Great old boy," he said, smiling at Bob and shaking his hand. "Really one of the veterans of advertising, you know. Used to write copy for Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup. Tells some fascinating yarns. Too bad I haven't the time to listen. I expect to see you back here soon, Mr. Rosen," he said, still holding Bob's hand as they walked to the door, "with another one of your lovely stories. One that we can feel delighted to buy. No costume dramas, no foreign settings, nothing outré, passé, or avant-garde, and above all—nothing controversial or sordid. You're not going to be one of those *hungry* writers, are you?"

Even before he answered, Rosen observed Tressling's eyes dismiss him; and he resolved to start work immediately on an outré, controversial, sordid costume drama with a foreign setting, etc., if it killed him.

He made the wrong turn for the elevator and on coming back he came face to face with the old

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man. "'Demography of the Jackson Whites',' the old man said, feigning amazement. "What do you care about those poor suckers for? They don't buy, they don't sell, they don't start fashion, they don't follow fashion. Just poach, fornicate, and produce oh-point-four hydrocephalic albinoes per hundred. Or something."

The elevator came and they got in together. The old man stared at him, his yellow-bloody eye like a fertilized egg. "Not that I blame them," he went on. "If I'd had any sense I'd've become a Jackson White instead of an advertising man. The least you can do," he said, without any transition, "is to buy me a drink. Since Truthful Tressling blames it onto you that he can't see me, the lying bugger. Why, for crying out loud!" he cried. "What I've got here in this little old portfolio—why, it's worth more to those men on Madison, Lexington, Park—if they only—"

"Let me buy you a drink," said Rosen, resignedly. The streets were hot, and he hoped the bar would be cool.

"A ball of Bushmill," said old Peter Martens.

The bar *was* cool. Bob had stopped listening to his guest's monologue about what he had in his little old portfolio (something about spotting fashion trends way in advance) and had begun talking about his own concerns. By and by the old man, who was experienced beyond the norm in not being listened to, had begun to listen to *him*.

"This was when everybody was reading Aku-Aku," Bob said. "So I thought for sure that mine would go over good because it was about Rapa Nui—Easter Island—and Peruvian blackbirders and hints of great legends of the past and all that."

"And?"

"And it didn't. The publisher, the only one who showed any interest at all, I mean, *that* publisher, he said *he* liked the writing but the public wouldn't buy it. He advised me to study carefully the other paperbacks on the stands. See what they're like, go thou and do likewise. So I did. You know the stuff. On even-numbered pages the heroine gets her brassiere ripped off while she cries, *'Yes! Yes! Now! Oh!'*"

He was not aware of signalling, but from time to time a hand appeared and renewed their glasses. Old Martens asked, "Does she cry 'rapturously'—or 'joyously'?"

"Rapturously *and* joyously. What's the matter, you think she's frigid?"

Martens perished the thought. At a nearby table a large blond said, lugubriously, "You know, Harold, it's a lucky thing the Good Lord didn't give me any children or I would of wasted my life on

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them like I did on my rotten stepchildren." Martens asked what happened on the odd-numbered children.

"I mean, 'pages'," he corrected himself, after a moment.

The right side of Bob Rosen's face was going numb. The left side started tingling. He interrupted a little tune he was humming and said, "Oh, the equation is invariable: On odd-numbered pages the hero either clonks some bastard bloodily on the noggin with a roscoe, or kicks him in the collions and *then* clonks him, or else he's engaged—with his shirt off, you're not allowed to say what gives with the pants, which are so much more important: presumably they melt or something—he's engaged, shirtless, in arching his lean and muscular flanks over some bimbo, *not* the heroine, because these aren't her pages, some other female in whose pelvis he reads strange mysteries . . ." He was silent for a moment, brooding.

"How could it fail, then?" asked the old man, in his husky voice. "I've seen the public taste change, let me tell you, my boy, from A Girl of the Limberlost (which was so pure that nuns could read it) to stuff which makes stevedores blench: so I am moved to inquire, How could the work you are describing to me fail?"

The young man shrugged. "The nuns were making a come-back. Movies about nuns, books about nuns, nuns on TV, westerns. . . . So the publisher said public taste had changed, and could I maybe do him a life of St. Teresa?"

"Coo."

"So I spent three months doing a life of St. Teresa at a furious pace, and when I finished it turned out I'd done the wrong saint. The simple slob had no idea there was any more than one of the name, and I never thought to ask did he mean the Spanish St. Teresa or the French one? D'Avila or The Little Flower?"

"Saints preserve us. . . . Say, do you know that wonderful old Irish toast? 'Here's to the Council of Trent, that put the fasting on the meat and not on the drink'?"

Bob gestured to the barkeeper. "But I didn't understand why if one St. Teresa could be sold, the other one couldn't. So I tried another publisher, and all *he* said was, public taste had changed, and could I do him anything with a background of juvenile delinquency? After that I took a job for a while selling frozen custard in a penny arcade and all my friends said, BOB! You with *your talent*? How COULD you?"

The large blonde put down a jungle-green drink and looked at her companion. "What you mean, they love me? If they love me why are they going to Connecticut? You don't go to Connecticut if you love a person," she pointed out.

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Old Martens cleared his throat. "My suggestion would be that you combine all three of your mysteriously unsalable novels. The hero sails on a Peruvian blackbirder to raid Easter Island, the inhabitants whereof he kicks in the collions, if male, or arches his loins over, if female; until he gets converted by a vision of both St. Teresas who tell him their life stories—as a result of which he takes a job selling frozen custard in a penny arcade in order to help the juvenile delinquents who frequent the place."

Bob grunted. "Depend on it, with my luck I would get it down just in time to see public taste change again. The publishers would want a pocket treasury of the McGuffey Readers, or else the memoirs of Constantine Porphyrogenetus. I could freeze my arse climbing the Himalayas only to to descend, manuscript in hand, to find everybody on Publishers' Row vicariously donning goggles and spearing fish on the bottom of the Erythrean Sea. . . . Only thing is, I never was sure to what degree public taste changed by itself or how big a part the publishers play in changing it. . . ."

The air, cool though he knew it was, seemed to shimmer in front of him, and through the shimmer he saw Peter Martens sitting up straight and leaning over at him, his seamed and ancient face suddenly eager and alive. "And would you like to be sure?" old Martens asked. "Would you like to be able to know, really to *know*?"

"What? How?" Bob was startled. The old man's eye looked almost all blood by now.

"Because," Martens said, "*I* can tell you what. *I* can tell you how. Nobody else. Only *me*. And not just about books, about everything. Because—"

There was an odd sort of noise, like the distant sussuration of wind in dry grass, and Rosen looked around and he saw that a man was standing by them and laughing. This man wore a pale brown suit and had a pale brown complexion, he was very tall and very thin and had a very small head and slouched somewhat. He looked like a mantis, and a mustache like an inverted V was cropped out of the broad blue surface of his upper lip.

"Still dreaming your dreams, Martens?" this man asked, still wheezing his dry whispery laugh. "Gates of Horn, or Gates of Ivory?"

"Get the Hell away from me, Shadwell," said Martens.

Shadwell turned his tiny little head to Rosen and grinned. "He been telling you about how he worked an old Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup Account? Too bad the Harrison Narcotics killed that business! He tell you how he worked on the old Sapolio account. The old Stanley Steamer account?" ("Shove off, Shadwell,"

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Martens ordered, planting his elbows on the table and opening his mouth at Bob again.) "Or has he been muttering away like an old Zambezi hand who claims to know the location of the Elephants' Graveyard? Tell me, where is fashion bred?" he intoned. "In the bottle—or in Martens' head?"

Martens' head, thinly covered with yellowish-white hair, jerked in the direction of the new arrival. "This, my boy, is T. Pettys Shadwell, the most despicable of living men. He runs—out of his pocket, because no one will sell him a hat on credit—he runs a so-called market research business. Though who in blazes would hire him since Polly Adler went respectable beats the Hell out of me. I'm warning you, Shadwell," he said, "take off. I've had my fill of you. I'm not giving you any more information." And with a further graphic description of what else he would *not* give T. Pettys Shadwell if the latter was dying of thirst, he folded his arms and fell silent.

The most despicable of living men chuckled, poked a bone-thin hand into a pocket, plucked out a packet of white flaps of cardboard, one of which he tore along a perforated line and handed to Bob. "My card, sir. My operation, true, is not large, but it is Ever Growing. Don't take Mr. Martens too seriously. And don't buy him too many drinks. His health is not as good as it used to be—but then, it never was." And with a final laugh, like the rustling of dried corn-shucks, he angled away.

Martens sighed, lapped the last few dewy drops of Bushmill's off a molten ice-cube. "I live in mortal fear that some day I'll have the money to buy all the booze I want and wake up finding I have spilled the beans to that cockatrice who just walked out. Can you imagine anyone having business cards printed to be torn off of perforated pads? Keeps them from getting loose and wrinkled, is his reason. Such a man has no right, under natural or civil law, to live."

In the buzzing coolness of the barroom Bob Rosen tried to catch hold of a thought which was coyly hiding behind a corner in his mind. His mind otherwise, he felt, was lucid as never before. But somehow he lost the thought, found he was telling himself a funny story in French and—although he had never got more than an 80 in the course, back in high school—marvelled at the purity of his accent and then chuckled at the punch-line.

" 'Never mind about black neglijays,' " the stout blonde was saying. " 'If you want to keep your husband's affections,' I said to her, 'then listen to me—' "

The errant thought came trotting back for reasons of its own, and jumped into Bob's lap. " 'Spill the beans'?" he quoted, question-

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ingly. "Spill *what* beans? To Shadwell, I mean."

"Most despicable of living men," said old Martens, mechanically. Then a most curious expression washed over his antique countenance: proud, cunning, fearful . . .

"Would you like to know the sources of the Nile?" he asked. "Would you?"

" 'Let him *go* to Maine,' I said. 'Let him paint rocks all day,' I said. 'Only for Heaven's sake, keep him the Hell off of Fire Island,' I said. And was I right, Harold?" demanded the large blonde.

Pete Martens was whispering something, Bob realized. By the look on his face it must have been important, so the young man tried to hear the words over the buzzing, and thought to himself in a fuddled fashion that they ought to be taken down on a steno pad, or something of that sort . . . *want to know, really know, where it begins and how, and how often?* But no; what do I know? For years I've been Clara the rotten step-mother, and now I'm Clara the rotten mother-in-law. *Are there such in every generation? Must be . . . known for years . . . known for years . . . only, Who? —and Where?—searched and sought, like Livingston and all the others searching and seeking, enduring privation, looking for the sources of the Nile . . .*

Someone, it must have been Clara, gave a long, shuddering cry; and then for a while there was nothing but the buzzing, buzzing, buzzing, in Bob Rosen's head; while old Martens lolled back in the chair, regarding him silently and sardonically with his blood-red eye, over which the lid slowly, slowly drooped: but old Martens never said a word more.

It was one genuine horror of a hangover, subsiding slowly under (or perhaps despite) every remedy Bob's aching brain could think of: black coffee. strong tea, chocolate milk, raw-egg-red-pepper-worcestershire sauce. At least, he thought gratefully after a while, he was spared the dry heaves. At least he had all the fixings in his apartment and didn't have to go out. It was a pivotal neighborhood, and he lived right in the pivot, a block where lox and bagels beat a slow retreat before the advance of hog maw and chitterlings on the one hand and *bodegas, comidas criollas,* on the other; swarms of noisy kids running between the trucks and buses, the jackhammers forever wounding the streets.

It took him a moment to realize that the noise he was hearing now was not the muffled echo of the drills, but a tapping on his door. Unsteadily, he tottered over and opened it. He would have been not in the least surprised to find a raven there, but instead it was a tall man, rather stooping, with a

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tiny head, hands folded mantis-like at his bosom.

After a few dry, futile clickings, Bob's throat essayed the name "Shadburn?"

"Shadwell," he was corrected, softly. "T. Pettys Shadwell . . . I'm afraid you're not well, Mr. Rosen . . ."

Bob clutched the doorpost, moaned softly. Shadwell's hands unfolded, revealed—not a smaller man at whom he'd been nibbling, but a paper bag, soon opened.

". . . so I thought I'd take the liberty of bringing you some hot chicken broth."

It was gratefully warm, had both body and savor. Bob lapped at it, croaked his thanks. "Not at all, not-a-tall," Shadwell waved. "Glad to be of some small help." A silence fell, relieved only by weak, gulping noises. "Too bad about old Martens. Of course, he *was* old. Still, a shocking thing to happen to you. A stroke, I'm told. I, uh, trust the police gave you no trouble?"

A wave of mild strength seemed to flow into Bob from the hot broth. "No, they were very nice," he said. "The sergeant called me, 'Son.' They brought me back here."

"Ah." Shadwell was reflective. "He had no family. I know that for a fact."

"Mmm."

"But—assume he left a few dollars. Unlikely, but— And assume he'd willed the few dollars to someone or some charity, perhaps. Never mind. Doesn't concern us. He wouldn't bother to will his papers . . . scrapbooks of old copy he'd written, so forth. That's of no interest to people in general. Just be thrown out or burned. But it would be of interest to *me*. I mean, I've been in advertising all my life, you know. Oh, yes. Used to distribute handbills when I was a boy. Fact."

Bob tried to visualize T. Pettys Shadwell as a boy, failed, drank soup. "Good soup," he said. "Thanks. Very kind of you."

Shadwell urged him strongly not to mention it. He chuckled. "Old Pete used to lug around some of the darndest stuff in that portfolio of his," he said. "In fact, some of it referred to a scheme we were once trying to work out together. Nothing came of it, however, and the old fellow was inclined to be a bit testy about that, still— I believe you'd find it interesting. May I show you?"

Bob still felt rotten, but the death wish had departed. "Sure," he said. Shadwell looked around the room, then at Bob, expectantly. After a minute he said, "Where is it?" "Where is what?" "The portfolio. Old Martens'."

They stared at each other. The phone rang. With a wince and a groan, Bob answered. It was Noreen, a girl with pretensions to

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stagecraft and literature, with whom he had been furtively lecherous on an off-and-on basis, the off periods' commencements being signaled by the presence in Noreen's apartment of Noreen's mother, (knitting, middleclass morality and all) when Bob came, intent on venery.

"I've got a terrible hangover," he said, answering her first (guarded and conventional) question; "and the place is a mess."

"See what happens if I turn my back on you for a minute?" Noreen clucked, happily. "Luckily, I have neither work nor social obligations planned for the day, so I'll be right over."

Bob said, "Crazy!", hung up, and turned to face Shadwell, who had been nibbling the tips of his prehensile fingers. "Thanks for the soup," he said, in tones of some finality.

"But the portfolio?" "I haven't got it." "It was leaning against the old man's chair when I saw the two of you in the bar." "Then maybe it's still *in* the bar. Or in the hospital. Or maybe the cops have it. But—" "It isn't. They don't." "But *I* haven't got it. Honest, Mr. Shadwell, I appreciate the soup, but I don't know where the Hell—"

Shadwell rubbed his tiny, sharp mustache, like a ∧-mark pointing to his tiny, sharp nose. He rose. "This is really too bad. Those papers referring to the business old Peter and I had been mutually engaged in—really, I have as much right to them as . . . But look here. Perhaps he may have spoken to you about it. He always did when he'd been drinking and usually did even when he wasn't. What he liked to refer to as, 'The sources of the Nile'? Hmm?" The phrase climbed the belfry and rang bells audible, or at least apparent, to Shadwell. He seemed to leap forward, long fingers resting on Bob's shoulders.

"You do know what I mean. Look. You: Are a writer. The old man's ideas aren't in your line. I: Am an advertising man. They are in my line. For the contents of his portfolio—as I've explained, they are rightfully mine—I will give: One thousand: Dollars. In fact: For the opportunity of merely *looking* through it: I will give: One *hundred.* Dollars."

As Bob reflected that his last check had been for $17.72 (Monegasque rights to a detective story), and as he heard these vasty sums bandied about, his eyes grew large, and he strove hard to recall what the Hell *had* happened to the portfolio—but in vain.

Shadwell's dry, whispery voice took on a pleading note. "I'm even willing to pay you for the privilege of discussing your conversation with the old f— the old gentleman. Here—" And he reached into his pocket. Bob wavered. Then he recalled that Noreen was even now on her way uptown and

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crosstown, doubtless bearing with her, as usual, in addition to her own taut charms, various tokens of exotic victualry to which she—turning her back on the veal chops and green peas of childhood and suburbia—was given: such as Shashlik makings, *lokoumi,* wines of the warm south, *baklava, provalone,* and other living witnesses to the glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome.

Various hungers, thus stimulated, began to rise and clamor, and he steeled himself against Shadwell's possibly unethical and certainly inconveniently timed offers.

"Not now," he said. Then, throwing delicacy to the winds, "I'm expecting a girl friend. Beat it. Another time."

Annoyance and chagrin on Shadwell's small face, succeeded by an exceedingly disgusting leer. "Why, of *course,*" he said. "Another time? Cer-tain-ly. My card —" He hauled out the perforated pack. "I already got one," Bob said. "Goodbye."

He made haste to throw off the noisome clothes in which he had been first hot, then drunk, then comatose; to take a shower, comb his mouse-colored hair, shave the pink bristles whose odious tint alone prevented him from growing a beard, to spray and anoint himself with various nostra which T. Pettys Shadwell's more successful colleagues in advertising had convinced him (by a thousand ways, both blunt and subtle) were essential to his acceptance by good society; then to dress and await with unconcealed anticipation the advent of the unchaste Noreen.

She came, she kissed him, she prepared food for him: ancient duties of women, any neglect of which is a sure and certain sign of cultural decadence and retrogression. Then she read everything he had written since their last juncture, and here she had some fault to find.

"You waste too much time at the beginning, in description," she said, with the certainty possible to those who have never sold a single manuscript. "You've got to make your characters come *alive*—in the very first sentence."

" 'Marley was dead, to begin with,' " muttered Bob.

"What?" murmured Noreen, vaguely, feigning not to hear. Her eye, avoiding lover boy, lit on something else. "What's this?" she asked. "You have so much money you just leave it lying around? I thought you said you were broke." And Bob followed her pointing and encarnadined fingertip to where lay two crisp twenty-dollar bills, folded lengthwise, on the table next the door.

"Shadwell!" he said, instantly. And, in response to her arched brows (which would have looked much better unplucked, but who

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can what will away?), he said, "A real rat of a guy—a louse, a boor—who had some crumby proposal."

"And who also has," said Noreen, going straight to the heart of the matter, "money." Bob resolved never to introduce the two of them, if he could help it. "Anyway," she continued, laying aside Bob's manuscript, "now you can take me out somewhere." Feebly he argued the food then cooking; she turned off the gas and thrust the pots incontinently into the ice-box, rose, and indicated she was now ready to leave. He had other objections to leaving just then, which it would have been impolitic to mention, for in Noreen's scheme of morality each episode of passion was a sealed incident once it was over, and constituted no promise of any other yet to come.

With resignation tempered by the reflection that Shadwell's four sawbucks couldn't last forever, and that there was never so long-drawn-out an evening but would wind up eventually back in his apartment, Bob accompanied her out the door.

And so it was. The next day, following Noreen's departure in mid-morning, found Bob in excellent spirits but flat-broke. He was reviewing the possibilities of getting an advance from his agent, Stuart Emmanuel, a tiny, dapper man whose eyes behind double lenses were like great black shoe-buttons, when the phone rang. ESP or no ESP, it was Stuart himself, with an invitation to lunch.

"I'm glad *some* of your clients are making money," said Bob, most ungraciously.

"Oh, it's not my money," said Stuart. "It's J. Oscar Rutherford's. One of his top men—no, it's not Joe Tressling, I know you saw him the day before yesterday, yes, I know nothing came of it, this is a different fellow altogether. Phillips Anhalt. I want you to come."

So Bob left yesterday's half-cooked chow in the ice-box and, very little loath, set out to meet Stuart and Phillips Anhalt, of whom he had never heard before. The first rendezvous was for a drink at a bar whose name also meant nothing to him, though as soon as he walked in he recognized it as the one where he had been the day before yesterday, and this made him uneasy—doubly so, for he had callously almost forgotten what had happened there. The bartender, it was at once evident, had not. His wary glance at the three of them must have convinced him that they were reasonably good insurance risks, however, for he made no comment.

Anhalt was a middle-sized man with a rather sweet and slightly baffled face and iron-grey haircut *en brosse*. "I enjoyed your story very much," he told Bob—thus

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breaking in at once upon the shallow slumber of the little scold who boarded in Bob's Writer's Consciousness. Of *course* (it shrilled) I know *exactly* the one you mean, after all, I've written only *one* story in my entire *life* so *"your story"* is the only identification it needs. I liked your *novel,* Mr. Hemingway. I enjoyed your *play,* Mr. Kaufman.

Stuart Emmanuel, who knew the labyrinthine ways of writers' mind as he knew the figures in his bank statement, said smoothly, "I expect Mr. Anhalt refers to *Unvexed to the Sea.*"

With firm politeness Mr. Anhalt disappointed this expectation. "I know that's the prize-winner," he said, "and I mean to read it, but the one I referred to was *The Green Wall.*" Now, as it happened, this very short little story had been bounced thirteen times before its purchase for a negligible sum by a low-grade salvage market of a magazine; but it was one of Bob's favorites. He smiled at Phillips Anhalt, Anhalt smiled at him, Stuart beamed and ordered drinks.

The waiter passed a folded slip of paper to Bob Rosen when he came with the popskull. "The lady left it," he said. "What lady?" "The blonde lady." Agent and ad man smiled, made appropriate remarks while Bob scanned the note, recognized it as being in his own handwriting, failed to make it out, crammed it in his pocket.

"Mr. Anhalt," said Stuart, turning dark, large-pupiled eyes on his client, is a very important man at Rutherford's: he has a corner office." A gentle, somewhat tired smile from Anhalt, who gave the conversation a turn and talked about his home in Darien, and the work he was doing on it, by himself. Thus they got through the round of drinks, then walked a few blocks to the restaurant.

Here Bob was infinitely relieved that Anhalt did not order poached egg on creamed spinach, corned beef hash, or something equally simple, wholesome, and disgusting, and tending to inhibit Bob's own wide-ranging tastes: Anhalt ordered duckling, Stuart had mutton chops, and Bob chose tripe and onions.

"Joe Tressling tells me that you're going to write something for the cheese show," said Anhalt, as they disarranged the pickle plate. Bob half-lifted his eyebrows, smiled. Stuart gazed broodingly into the innards of a sour tomato as if he might be saying to himself, "Ten percent of $17.72, Monegasque rights to a detective story."

"More cheese is being eaten today in the United States than twenty-five years ago," Anhalt continued. "Much, much more. . . . Is it the result of advertising? Such as the Aunt Carrie Hour? Has that changed public taste? Or —has public taste changed for,

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say, other reasons, and are we just riding the wave?"

"The man who could have answered that question," Bob said, "died the day before yesterday."

Anhalt let out his breath. "How do you know he could have?"

"He said so."

Anhalt, who'd had a half-eaten dilled cucumber in his hand, carefully laid it in the ash-tray, and leaned forward. "What else did he say? Old Martens, I mean. You *do* mean Old Martens, don't you?"

Bob said that was right, and added, with unintentional untruthfulness, that he'd been offered a thousand dollars for that information, and had turned it down. Before he could correct himself, Anhalt, customary faint pink face gone almost red, and Stuart Emmanuel, eyes glittering hugely, said with one voice, "*Who* offered—?"

"What comes out of a chimney?"

Stuart, recovering first (Anhalt continued to stare, said nothing, while the color receded), said, "Bob, this is not a joke. That is the reason we have this appointment. An awful lot of money is involved —for you, for me, for Phil Anhalt, for, well, for everybody. For just everybody. So—"

It slipped out. "For T. Pettys Shadwell?" Bob asked.

The effect, as they used to say in pre-atomic days, was electrical. Stuart made a noise, between a moan and a hiss, rather like a man who, having trustingly lowered his breeches, sits all unawares upon an icicle. He clutched Bob's hand. "You didn't godforbid *sign* anything?" he wailed. Anhalt, who had gone red before, went white this time around, but still retained diffidence enough to place his hand merely upon Bob's jacket-cuff.

"He's a cad!" he said, in trembling tones. "A swine, Mr. Rosen!"

" 'The most despicable of living men'," quoted Mr. Rosen. ("Exactly," said Anhalt.)

"Bob, you didn't *sign* anything, godforbid?"

"No. No. No. But I feel as if I've had all the mystery I intend to have. And unless I get Information, why, gents, I shan't undo one button." The waiter arrived with the food and, according to the rules and customs of the Waiters' Union, gave everybody the wrong orders. When this was straightened out, Stuart said, confidently, "Why, of course, Bob: Information: Why, certainly. There is nothing to conceal. Not from *you*." he said, chuckling. "Go ahead, start eating. I'll eat and talk, you just eat and listen.

And so, as he tucked away the tripe and onions, Bob heard Stuart recount, through a slight barrier of masticated mutton-chop, a most astonishing tale. In every generation (Stuart said) there

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were leaders of fashion, arbiters of style. At Nero's court, Petronius. In Regency England, Beau Brummel. At present and for some time past, everyone knew about the Paris designers and their influence. And in the literary field ("Ahah!" muttered Bob, staring darkly at his forkful of stewed ox-paunch)—in the literary field, said Stuart, swallowing in haste for greater clarity, they all knew what effect a review by any one of A Certain Few Names, on the front page of the Sunday Times book section, could have upon the work of even an absolute unknown.

"It will sky-rocket it to Fame and Fortune with the speed of light," said Stuart.

"Come to the point." But Stuart, now grinding away on a chunk of grilled sheep, could only gurgle, wave his fork, and raise his eyebrows. Anhalt stopped his moody task of reducing the duckling to a mass of orange-flavored fibres, and turned to take the words, as it were, from Stuart's mutton-filled mouth.

"The point, Mr. Rosen, is that poor old Martens went up and down Madison Avenue for years claiming he had found a way of predicting fashions and styles, and nobody believed him. Frankly, *I* didn't. But I do now. What caused me to change my mind was this: When I heard, day before yesterday, that he had died so suddenly, I had a feeling that I *had* something of his, something that he'd left for me to look at once, something I'd taken just to get rid of him. And, oh, perhaps I was feeling a bit guilty, certainly a bit sorry, so I asked my secretary to get it for me. Well, you know, with the J. Oscar Rutherford people, as with Nature, nothing is ever lost—" Phillips Anhalt smiled his rather shy, rather sweet and slightly baffled smile— "so she got it for me and I took a look at it. . . . I was . . ." he paused, hesitated for *mot juste*.

Stuart, with a masterful swallow, leaped into the breach, claymore in hand. "He was flabbergasted!"

Astounded, amended Anhalt. He was astounded.

There, in an envelope addressed to Peter Martens, and postmarked November 10, 1945, was a color snapshot of a young man wearing a fancy weskit.

"Now, you know, Mr. Rosen, no one in 1945 was wearing fancy weskits. They didn't come in till some years later. How did Marten *know* they were going to come in? And there was another snapshot of a young man in a charcoal suit and a pink shirt. *Nobody* was wearing that outfit in '45 . . . I checked the records, you see, and the old gentleman had left the things for me in December of that year. I'm ashamed to say that I had the receptionist put him off when he called again

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. . . But just think of it: fancy weskits, charcoal suits, pink shirts, in 1945." He brooded. Bob asked if there was anything about grey flannel suits in the envelope, and Anhalt smiled a faint and fleeting smile.

"Ah, Bob, now, Bob," Stuart pursed his mouth in mild (and greasy) reproof. "You still don't seem to realize that this is S*E*R*I*O*U*S*."

"Indeed it is," said P. Anhalt. "As soon as I told Mac about it, do you know what he said, Stu? He said, 'Phil, don't spare the horses.'" And they nodded soberly, as those who have received wisdom from on high.

"Who," Bob asked, "is Mac?"

Shocked looks. Mac, he was told, the older men speaking both tandem and *au pair*, was Robert R. Mac Ian, head of the happy J. Oscar Rutherford corporate family.

"Of course, Phil," Stuart observed, picking slyly at his baked potato, "I won't ask why it took you till this morning to get in touch with me. With some other outfit, I might maybe suspect that they were trying to see what they could locate for themselves without having to cut our boy, here, in for a slice of the pie. He being the old man's confidante and moral heir, anyway, so to speak." (Bob stared at this description, said nothing. Let the thing develop as far at it would by itself, he reflected.) "But not the Rutherford outfit. It's too big, too ethical, for things like that." Anhalt didn't answer.

After a second, Stuart went on, "Yes, Bob, this is really something big. If the late old Mr. Martens' ideas can be successfully developed—and I'm sure Phil, here will not expect you to divulge until we are ready to talk Terms—they will be really invaluable to people like manufacturers, fashion editors, designers, merchants, and, last but not least—advertising men. Fortunes can literally be made, and saved. No wonder that a dirty dog like this guy Shadwell is trying to horn in on it. Why, listen—but I'm afraid we'll have to terminate this enchanting conversation. Bob has to go home and get the material in order—" (What material? Bob wondered. Oh, well, so far: $40 from Shadwell and a free lunch from Anhalt.)— "and you and I, Phil, will discuss those horses Mac said not to spare."

Anhalt nodded. It seemed obvious to Rosen that the ad man was unhappy, unhappy about having given Peter Martens the brush-off while he was alive, unhappy about being numbered among the vultures now that he was dead. And, so thinking, Bob realized with more than a touch of shame, that he himself was now numbered among the vultures; and he asked about funeral arrangements.

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But it seemed that the Masonic order was taking care of that: the late Peter Martens was already on his way back to his native town of Marietta, Ohio, where his lodge brothers would give him a formal farewell: aprons, sprigs of acacia, and all the ritual appurtenances. And Bob thought, why not? And was feeling somehow, very much relieved.

On the uptown bus which he had chosen over the swifter, hotter, dingier subway, he tried to collect his thoughts. What on earth could he ever hope to remember about a drunken conversation, which would make any sense to anybody, let alone be worth money? "The Sources of the Nile," the old man had said, glaring at him with bloody eye. Well, Shadwell knew the phrase, too. Maybe Shadwell knew what it meant, exactly what it meant, because he, Bob Rosen, sure as Hell didn't. But the phrase did catch at the imagination. Martens had spent years—who knew how many?—seeking the sources of his particular Nile, the great river of fashion, as Mungo Park, Livingstone, Speke, and other half-forgotten explorers, had spent years in search of theirs. They had all endured privation, anguish, rebuffs, hostility . . . and in the end, just as the quest had killed Mungo Park, Livingstone, Speke, the other quest had killed old Peter Martens.

But, aside from insisting that there *was* a source or sources, and that he knew *where,* what had Pete said? Why hadn't Bob stayed sober? Probably the fat blonde at the next table, she of the poisonously green drink and the rotten step-children, probably she retained more of the old man's tale, picked up by intertable osmosis, than did Bob himself.

And with that he heard the voice of the waiter at the bar that noon: *The lady left it . . . What lady? . . . The blonde lady . . .* Bob scrabbled in his pocket and came up with the note. On the sweaty, crumpled bit of paper, scrawled in his own writing, or a cruel semblance of it, he read: *Ditx sags su Bimsoh oh—*

"What the *Hell*!" he muttered, and fell to, with furrowed face, to make out what evidently owed more to Bushmill's than to Everhard Faber. At length he decided that the note read, *Peter says, see Bensons on Purchase Place, the Bronx, if I don't believe him. Peter says, write it down.*

"It must mean something," he said, half-aloud, staring absently from Fifth Avenue to Central Park, as the bus roared and rattled between opulence and greenery. "It has to mean something."

"Well, what a shame," said Mr. Benson. "But how nice it was of you to come and tell us." His wavy-gray hair was cut evenly

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around in soupbowl style, and as there was no white skin at the back of his neck, had evidently been so cut for some time. "Would you like some iced tea?"

"Still, he Went Quickly," said Mrs. Benson, who, at the business of being a woman, was in rather a large way of business. "I don't think there's any iced tea, Daddy. When I have to go, that's the way I want to go. Lemonade, maybe?"

"There isn't any lemonade if what Kitty was drinking was the last of the lemonade. The Masons give you a nice funeral. A real nice funeral. I used to think about joining up, but I never seem to get around to it. I think there's some gin. Isn't there some gin, Mommy? How about a nice cool glass of gin-and-cider, Bob? Kit will make us some, by and by."

Bob said, softly, that that sounded nice. He sat half-sunken in a canvas chair in the large, cool living-room. A quarter of an hour ago, having found out with little difficulty *which* house on Purchase Place was the Bensons', he had approached with something close to fear and trembling. Certainly, he had been sweating in profusion. The not-too-recently painted wooden house was just a blind, he told himself. Inside there would be banks of noiseless machines into which cards were fed and from which tapes rolled in smooth continuity. And a large, broad-shouldered young man whose hair was cut so close to the skull that the scars underneath were plain to see, this young man would bar Bob's way and, with cold, calm, confidence, say, "Yes?"

"Er, um, Mr. Martens told me to see Mr. Benson."

"There is no Mr. Martens connected with our organization and Mr. Benson has gone to Washington. I'm afraid you can't come in: everything here is Classified."

And Bob would slink away, feeling Shoulders' scornful glance in the small of his shrinking, sweaty back.

But it hadn't been like that at all. Not anything like that at all.

Mr. Benson waved an envelope at Bob. "Here's a connivo, if you like," he said. "Fooled I don't know how many honest collectors, and dealers, too: Prince Abu-Somebody flies over here from Pseudo-Arabia without an expense account. Gets in with some crooked dealers, *I* could name them, but I won't, prints off this *en—tire* issue of airmails, precancelled. Made a mint. Flies back to Pseudo-Arabia, *whomp!* they cut off his head!" And he chuckled richly at the thought of this prompt and summary vengeance. Plainly, in Mr. Benson's eyes, it had been done in the name of philatelic ethics; no considerations of dynastic intrigues among the petrol pashas entered his mind.

"Kitty, are you going to make us

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some cold drinks?" Mrs. B. inquired. "Poor old Pete, he used to be here for Sunday dinner on and off, oh, for just years. Is that Bentley coming?"

Bob just sat and sucked in the coolness and the calm and stared at Kitty. Kitty had a tiny stencil cut in the design of a star and she was carefully lacquering her toenails with it. He could hardly believe she was for real. "Ethereal" was the word for her beauty, and "ethereal" was the only word for it. Long, long hair of an indescribable gold fell over her heart-shaped face as she bent forward towards each perfectly formed toe. And she was wearing a dress like that of a child in a Kate Greenaway book.

"Oh, Bentley," said B., Senior. "What do you think has happened? Uncle Peter Martens passed away, all of a sudden, day before yesterday, and this gentleman is a friend of his and came to tell us about it; isn't that thoughtful?"

Bentley said, *"Ahhh."* Bentley was a mid-teener who wore jeans cut off at the knees and sneakers with the toes, insteps, and heels removed. He was naked to the waist and across his suntanned and hairless chest, in a neat curve commencing just over his left nipple and terminating just under his right nipple, was the word *VIPERS* stenciled in red paint.

"Ahhh," said Bentley Benson. "Any pepsies?"

"Well, I'd asked you to bring some," his mother said, mildly. "Make a nice, big pitcher of gin-and-cider, Bentley, please, but only a *little* gin for yourself, in a separate glass, remember, now." Bentley said, *"Ahhh,"* and departed, scratching on his chest right over the bright, red *S*.

Bob's relaxed gaze took in, one by one, the pictures on the mantelpiece. He sat up a bit, pointed. "Who is that?" he asked. The young man looked something like Bentley and something like Bentley's father.

"That's my oldest boy, Barton, Junior," said Mother B. "You see that nice vest he's wearing? Well, right after the War, Bart, he was in the Navy then, picked up a piece of lovely brocade over in Japan, and he sent it back home. I thought of making a nice bed-jacket out of it, but there wasn't enough material. So I made it into a nice vest, instead. Poor old Uncle Peter, he liked that vest, took a picture of Bart in it. Well, what do you know, a few years later fancy vests became quite popular, and, of course, by that time Bart was tired of his ("Of course," Bob murmured), so he sold it to a college boy who had a summer job at Little and Harpey's. Got $25 for it, and we all went out to dinner down town that night."

Kitty delicately stenciled another star on her toenails.

"I see," Bob said. After a mo-

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ment, "Little and Harpey's?" he repeated.

Yes, that same. The publishers. Bart, and his younger brother Alton, were publishers' readers. Alt had been with Little and Harpey but was now with Scribbley's Sons; Bart had worked for Scribbley's at one time, too. "They've been with *all* the biggest publishing houses," their mother said, proudly. "Oh, *they* aren't any of your stick-in-the-muds, no sirree." Her hands had been fiddling with a piece of bright cloth, and then, suddenly, cloth and hands went up to her head, her fingers flashed, and—complete, perfect—she was wearing an intricately folded turban.

Bentley came in carrying a pitcher of drink in one hand and five glasses—one to each finger—in the other. "I told you to mix yours separately, I think," his mother said. Taking no notice of her youngest's *Ahhh*, she turned to Bob. "I have a whole basket of these pieces of madras," she said, "some silk, some cotton . . . and it's been on my mind all day. Now, if I just remember the way those old women from the West Indies used to tie them on their heads when I was girl . . . and now, sure enough, it just came back to me! How does it look?" she asked.

"Looks very nice, Mommy," said Bart, Sr. And added, "I bet it would cover up the curlers better than those babushkas the women wear, you know?"

Bob Rosen bet it would, too.

So here it was and this was it. The sources of the Nile. How old Peter Martens had discovered it, Bob did not know. By and by, he supposed, he would find out. How did they *do* it, was it that they had a *panache*—? or was it a "wild talent," like telepathy, second sight, and calling dice or balls? He did not know.

"Bart said he was reading a real nice manuscript that came in just the other day," observed Mrs. Benson, dreamily, over her glass. "About South America. He says he thinks that South America has been neglected, and that there is going to be a revival of interest in non-fiction about South America."

"No more Bushmen?" Barton, Sr., asked.

"No, Bart says he thinks the public is getting tired of Bushmen. He says he only gives Bushmen another three months and then—poo—you won't be able to *give* the books away." Bob asked what Alton thought. "Well, Alton is reading fiction now, you know. He thinks the public is getting tired of novels about murder and sex and funny war experiences. Alt thinks they're about ready for some novels about ministers. He said to one of the writers that Scribbley's publishes, 'Why don't you do a novel about a minister?' he said. And the man said he thought it was a good idea."

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There was a long, comfortable silence.

There was no doubt about it. *How* the Bensons did it, Bob still didn't know. But they did do it. With absolute unconsciousness and with absolute accuracy, they were able to predict future trends in fashion. It was marvelous. It was uncanny. It—

Kitty lifted her lovely head and looked at Bob through the long, silken skein of hair, then brushed it aside. "Do you ever have any money?" she asked. It was like the sound of small silver bells, her voice. Where, compared to this, were the flat Long Island vocables of, say, Noreen? Nowhere at all.

"Why, Kitty Benson, what a question," her mother said, reaching out her glass for Bentley to refill. "Poor Peter Martens, just to think—a little more, Bentley, don't think you're going to drink what's left, young man."

"Because if you ever have any money," said the voice like the Horns of Elfland. "We could go out somewhere together. Some boys don't ever have any money," it concluded, with infinitely loving melancholy.

"I'm going to have some money," Bob said at once. "Absolutely. Uh—when could—"

She smiled an absolute enchantment of a smile. "Not tonight," she said, "because I have a date. And not tomorrow night, because I have a date. But the day after tomorrow night, because then I don't have a date."

A little voice in one corner of Bob's mind said, "This girl has a brain about the size of a small split pea; you know that, don't you?" And another voice, much less little, in the opposite corner, shrieked, "Who *cares*? Who *cares*?" Furthermore, Noreen had made a faint but definite beginning on an extra chin, and her bosom tended (unless artfully and artificially supported) to droop. Neither was true of Kitty at all, at all.

"The day after tomorrow night, then," he said. "It's a date."

All that night he wrestled with his angel. "You can't expose these people to the sordid glare of modern commerce," the angel said, throwing him with a half-nelson. "They'd wither and die. Look at the dodo—look at the buffalo. Will you *look*?" "*You* look," growled Bob, breaking the hold, and seizing the angel in a scissors-lock. "I'm not going to let any damned account executives get their chicken-plucking hands on the Bensons. It'll all be done through me, see? Through *me*!" And with that he pinned the angel's shoulders to the mat. "And besides," he said, clenching his teeth, "I need the money . . ."

Next morning he called up his agent. "Here's just a few samples to toss Mr. Phillips Anhalt's way," he said grandiosely. "Write 'em

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down. Soupbowl haircuts for men. *That's* what I said. They can get a sunlamp treatment for the backs of their necks in the barber-shops. Listen. Women will stencil stars on their toe-nails with nail polish. Kate Greenaway style dresses for women are going to come in. Huh? Well, you bet your butt that Anhalt will know what Kate Greenaway means. Also, what smart women will wear will be madras kerchiefs tied up in the old West Indian way. This is very complicated, so I guess they'll have to be pre-folded and pre-stitched. Silks and cottons. . . . You writing this down? Okay.

"Teen-agers will wear, summer-time, I mean, they'll wear shorts made out of cut-down blue jeans. And sandals made out of cut-down sneakers. No shirts or undershirts—barechested, and—What? NO, for cry-sake, just the *boys!*"

And he gave Stuart the rest of it, books and all, and he demanded and got an advance. Next day Stuart reported that Anhalt reported that Mac Ian was quite excited. Mac had said—did Bob know what Phil said Mac said? Well, Mac said, "Let's not spoil the ship for a penny's worth of tar, Phil."

Bob demanded and received another advance. When Noreen called, he was brusque.

The late morning of his date-day he called to confirm it. That is, he tried to. The operator said that she was sorry, but that number had been disconnected. He made it up to the Bronx by taxi. The house was empty. It was not only empty of people, it was empty of everything. The wallpaper had been left, but that was all.

Many years earlier, about the time of his first cigarette, Bob had been led by a friend in the dead of night (say, half-past ten) along a quiet suburban street, pledged to confidence by the most frightful vows. Propped against the wall of a garage was a ladder—it did not go all the way to the roof: Bob and friend had pulled themselves up with effort which, in another context, would have won the full approval of their gym teacher. The roof made an excellent post to observe the going-to-bed preparations of a young woman who had seemingly never learned that window shades could be pulled down. Suddenly lights went on in another house, illuminating the roof of the garage; the young woman had seen the two and yelled; and Bob, holding onto the parapet with sweating hands and reaching for the ladder with sweating feet, had discovered that the ladder was no longer there. . . .

He felt the same way now.

Besides feeling stunned, incredulous, and panicky, he also felt annoyed. This was because he acutely realized that he was acting out an old moving picture scene.

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The scene would have been closer to the (film) realities had he been wearing a tattered uniform, and in a way he wanted to giggle, and in a way he wanted to cry. Only through obligation to the script did he carry the farce farther: wandering in and out of empty rooms, calling out names, asking if anyone was there.

No one was. And there were no notes or messages, not even *Croatan* carved on a doorpost. Once, in the gathering shadows, he thought he heard a noise, and he whirled around, half-expecting to see an enfeebled Mr. Benson with a bacon-fat lamp in one hand, or an elderly Negro, perhaps, who would say, tearfully, "Marse Bob, dem Yankees done burn all de cotton . . ." But there was nothing.

He trod the stairs to the next house and addressed inquiries to an old lady in a rocking-chair. "Well, I'm sure that *I* don't know," she said, in a paper-thin and fretful voice. "I saw them, all dressed up, getting into the car, and I said, 'Why, where are you all *going*, Hazel?' ("Hazel?" "Hazel Benson. I thought you said you *knew* them, young man?" "Oh, yes. Yes, of course. Please go on.") Well, I said, 'Where are you all *going*, Hazel?' And she said, 'It's time for a change, Mrs. Machen.' And they all laughed and they waved and they drove away. And then some men came and packed everything up and took it away in trucks. Well! 'Where did they all *go?*' I asked them. 'Where did they all *go?*' But do you think they'd have the common decency to *tell* me, after I've lived here for fifty-four years? Not-a-word. Oh—"

Feeling himself infinitely cunning, Bob said, offhandedly, "Yes, I know just the outfit you mean. O'Brien Movers."

"I do *not* mean O'Brien Movers. Whatever gave you such an idea? It was the Seven Sebastian Sisters."

And this was the most that Bob Rosen could learn. Inquiries at other houses either drew blanks or produced such probably significant items as, "Kitty said, 'Here are your curlers, because I won't need them anymore' "; "Yes, just the other day I was talking to Bart, Senior, and he said, 'You know, you don't realize that you're in a rut until you have to look up to see the sky.' Well, those Bensons always talked a little crazy, and so I thought nothing of it, until—"; and, "I said to Bentley, 'Vipe, how about tomorrow we go over to Williamsbridge and pass the chicks there in review?' and he said, 'No, Vipe, I can't make that scene tomorrow, my ancients put another poster on the billboard.' So I said, 'Ay-las,' and next thing I know—"

"His who did what?"

"Fellow, you don't wot this Viper talk one note, do you? His *family*, see, they had made other plans. They really cut loose, didn't they?"

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They really did. So there Bob was, neat and trim and sweet-smelling, and nowhere to go, and with a pocketful of money. He looked around the tree-lined street and two blocks away, on the corner, he saw a neon sign. *Harry's,* it flashed (green). *Bar and Grill* (red).

"Where's Harry?" he asked the middle-aged woman behind the bar.

"Lodge meeting," she said. "He'll be back soon. They aren't doing any labor tonight, just business. Waddle ya have?"

"A ball of Bushmill," he said. He wondered where he had heard that, last. It was cool in the bar. And then he remembered, and then he shuddered.

"Oh, that's bad," Stuart Emmanuel moaned. "That sounds very bad . . . And you shouldn't've gone to the moving van people yourself. Now you probably muddied the waters."

Bob hung his head. His efforts to extract information from the Seven Sebastian Sisters—apparently they were septuplets, and all had grey mustaches—had certainly failed wretchedly. And he kept seeing Kitty Benson's face, framed in her golden hair like a sun-lit nimbus, kept hearing Kitty Benson's golden voice.

"Well," Stuart said, "I'll do my damndest." And no doubt he did, but it wasn't enough. He was forced to come clean with Anhalt. And Anhalt, after puttering around, his sweet smile more baffled than ever, told Mac everything. Mac put the entire *force majeure* of the T. Oscar Rutherford organization behind the search. And they came up with two items.

Item. The Seven Sebastian Sisters had no other address than the one on Purchase Place, and all the furniture was in their fireproof warehouse, with two years' storage paid in advance.

Item. The owner of the house on Purchase Place said, "I told them I'd had an offer to buy the house, but I wouldn't, if they'd agree to a rent increase. And the next thing I knew, the keys came in the mail."

Little and Harpey, as well as Scribbley's Sons, reported only that Alt and Bârt, Junior, had said that they were leaving, but hadn't said where they were going.

"Maybe they've gone on a trip somewhere," Stuart suggested. "Maybe they'll come back before long. Anhalt has ears in all the publishing houses, maybe he'll hear something."

But before Anhalt heard anything, Mac decided that there was no longer anything to hear. "I wash my hands of it all," he declared. "It's a wild goose chase. Where did you ever pick up this crackpot idea in the first place?" And Phillips Anhalt's smile faded away. Weeks passed, and months.

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But Bob Rosen has never abandoned hope. He has checked with the Board of Education about Bentley's records, to see if they know anything about a transcript or transfer. He has haunted Nassau Street, bothering—in particular—dealers specializing in Pseudo-Arabian air mail issues, in hopes that Mr. Benson has made his whereabouts known to them. He has hocked his watch to buy hamburgers and pizzas for the Vipers, and innumerable Scotches on innumerable rocks for the trim young men and the girls fresh out of Bennington who staff the offices of our leading publishers. He—

In short, he has taken up the search of Peter Martens (Old Pete, Sneaky Pete). He is looking for the sources of the Nile. Has he *ever* found *anything*? Well, yes, as a matter of fact, he has.

The strange nature of cyclical coincidences has been summed up, somewhere, in the classical remark that one can go for years without seeing a one-legged man wearing a baseball cap; and then, in a single afternoon, one will see three of them. So it happened with Bob Rosen.

One day, feeling dull and heavy, and finding that the elfin notes of Kitty Benson's voice seemed to be growing fainter in his mind, Bob called up her old landlord.

"No," said the old landlord, "I never heard another word from them. And I'll tell you who else I never heard from, either. The fellow who offered to buy the house. He never came around and when I called his office, he just laughed at me. Fine way to do business."

"What's his name?" Bob asked, listlessly.

"Funny name," said the old landlord. "E. Peters Shadwall? Something like that. The Hell with him, anyway."

Bob tore his rooms apart looking for the card with the perforated top edge which Shadwell had —it seemed so very long ago— torn off his little book and given him. Also, it struck him, neither could he find the piece of paper on which he had scribbled Old Martens' last message, with the Bensons' name and street on it. He fumbled through the Yellow Book, but couldn't seem to locate the proper category for the mantis-man's business. And he gave up on the regular directory, what with Shad, Shadd, -wel, -well, -welle, etc.

He would, he decided, go and ask Stuart Emmanuel. The dapper little agent had taken the loss of the Bensons so hard ("It was a beauty of a deal," he'd all but wept) that he might also advance a small sum of money for the sake of the Quest. Bob was in the upper East 40s when he passed a bar where he had once taken Noreen for cocktails—a mistake, for it

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had advanced her already expensive tastes another notch—and this reminded him that he had not heard from her in some time. He was trying to calculate just how much time, and if he ought to do something about it, when he saw the third one-legged man in the baseball cap.

That is to say, speaking nonmetaphorically, he had turned to cross a street in the middle of a block, and was halted by the absence of any gap between the two vehicles (part of a traffic jam caused by a long-unclosed incision in the street) directly in front of him. Reading from right to left, the vehicles consisted of an Eleanor-blue truck reading *Grandma Goldberg's Yum-Yum Borsht,* and an Obscene-pink Jaguar containing T. Pettys Shadwell and Noreen.

It was the Moment of the Shock of Recognition. He understood everything.

Without his making a sound, they turned together and saw him, mouth open, everything written on his face. And they knew that he knew.

"Why, Bob," said Noreen. "Ah, Rosen," said Shadwell.

"I'm sorry that we weren't able to have you at the *wed*ding," she said. "But everything happened so *quickly*. Pete just swept me off my feet."

Bob said, "I'll bet."

She said, "Don't be bitter"—seeing that he was, and enjoying it. Horns sounded, voices cursed, but the line of cars didn't move.

"You did it," Bob said, coming close. Shadwell's hands left the wheel and came together at his chest, fingers down. "*You* saw that crisp green money he left and you saw his card and got in touch with him and *you* came in and took the note and—*Where are they?*" he shouted, taking hold of the small car and shaking it. "I don't give a damn about the money, just tell me where they are! Just let me see the girl!"

But T. Pettys Shadwell just laughed and laughed, his voice like the whisper of the wind in the dry leaves. "Why, *Bob,*" said Noreen, bugging her eyes and flashing her large, coarse gems, and giving the scene all she had, "why, Bob, was there a *girl*? You never told *me.*"

Bob abandoned his anger, disclaimed all interest in the commercial aspect of the Bensons, offered to execute bonds and sign papers in blood, if only he were allowed to see Kitty. Shadwell, fingering his tiny carat of a mustache, shrugged. "Write the girl a letter," he said, smirking. "I assure you, all mail will be forwarded." And then the traffic jam broke and the Jag zoomed off, Noreen's scarlet lips pursed in blowing a kiss.

"Write?" Why, bless you, of course Bob wrote. Every day and often twice a day for weeks. But never a reply did he get. And on

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realizing that his letters probably went no farther than Noreen (Mrs. T. Pettys) Shadwell, who doubtless gloated and sneered in the midst of her luxury, he fell into despair, and ceased. Where is Kitty of the heart-shaped face, Kitty of the light-gold hair, Kitty of the elfin voice? Where are her mother and father and her three brothers? Where now are the sources of the Nile? Ah, where?

So there you are. One can hardly suppose that Shadwell has perforce kidnapped the entire Benson family, but the fact is that they have disappeared almost entirely without trace, and the slight trace which remains leads directly to and only to the door of T. Pettys Shadwell Associates, Market Research Advisors. Has he whisked them all away to some sylvan retreat in the remote recesses of the Great Smoky Mountains? Are they even now pursuing their prophetic ways in one of the ever-burgeoning, endlessly proliferating suburbs of the City of the Angels? Or has he, with genius diabolical, located them so near to hand that far-sighted vision must needs forever miss them?

In deepest Brooklyn, perhaps, amongst whose labyrinthine ways an army of surveyors could scarce find their own stakes?—or in fathomless Queens, red brick and yellow brick, world without end, where the questing heart grows sick and faint?

Rosen does not know, but he has not ceased to care. He writes to live, but he lives to look, now selling, now searching, famine succeeding feast, but hope never failing.

Phillips Anhalt, however, has not continued so successfully. He has not Bob's hopes. Anhalt continues, it is true, with the T. Oscar Rutherford people, but no longer has his corner office, or any private office at all. Anhalt failed: Anhalt now has a desk in the bullpen with the other failures and the new apprentices.

And while Bob ceaselessly searches the streets—for who knows in which place he may find the springs bubbling and welling?—and while Anhalt drinks bitter tea and toils like a slave in a salt mine, that swine, that cad, that most despicable of living men, T. Pettys Shadwell, has three full floors in a new building of steel, aluminum, and blue-green glass a block from the Cathedral; he has a box at the Met, a house in Bucks County, a place on the Vineyard, an apartment in Beekman Place, a Caddy, a Bentley, *two* Jaguars, a yacht that sleeps ten, and one of the choicest small (but ever-growing) collection of Renoirs in private hands today. . . .

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A man lives as long as his memories live, and on the Blood Planet, lighted only by its many moons, memories do not last.

THE MAN ON THE BEACH

by Vance Aandahl

THERE WERE THIRTY MOONS, and each had thirty moons of its own, and all the moons glimmered in the night sky like pearls on a velvet tablecloth, and all the moons were reflected on the incoming waves—waves not of water, but of something else, something which no one understood. The waves were purple, purple as blood, crested with the silver light of the many moons: purple and silver, pulsing with the endless rhythm of the endless sea, heavy and thick and oily, not like water, but rather the viscous body fluid of the planet itself—a kind of blood, a kind of open, external circulatory system—and, if nothing else, most certainly a namesake, for the planet was sometimes known as the Blood Planet. The beach was all sand, red sand; the purple waves splashed onto it, and the red sand drank them; then there was only moonlight glittering in the sky and on the waves and across the beach and perhaps also on Alan Bronson's own back, for he was lost there, strange as it may seem, walking on the beach of the Blood Planet.

"I lost lonely here on the beach red in the land dangerous, none to help me, none to help me. . ."

First there had been the song, and then the drums, and then the fires on the red horizon, and then the nitramligs had danced into sight and destroyed everything, and then the nitramligs had danced away, and then there was nothing. Now he had walked beyond time, searching for the sacred similarity of another man, and finding nothing, for there was only moonlight, much moonlight, and waves, many waves, and sand, much sand, all red and purple and pearly but certainly not green or gentle or soft as once another place had been. Still, he walked.

"I lost lonely. Please. . ."

Nothing came to help him, for there was nothing but the sky and the sea and the earth, and perhaps there were nitramligs, but no men. Only Alan walked upon the beach;

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only Alan dreamed of things past: there had been a girl, a brown-skin girl with hair the color of brown nuts; he had found her hidden in a nest of green grass and white flowers, braiding her hair and softly singing a melancholy ballad. That had been a time of long summers and many carnivals —a time also of glass menageries and lemon drinks and innumerable insects. There had been another time as well, full of falling leaves, brown and crumbly—a time of gray skies and thundershowers and crisp pumpkins. He remembered two dogs that had swum at the side of his rowboat when he had once gone to a certain lake: one of them had been a mongrel, white with black spots; the other had been a golden retriever, fat and indolent. They both had laughed (dogs could laugh then) when he had petted them. There had been other times, but he could not remember such things.

"Some say man made from flesh blood bone brain; but I—I memories alone, nothing else. I memories; when memories go, I go. None to help me, though—none to help me . . ."

Suddenly Alan realized that he was facing a great crimson rock, which rose out of the beach like the spine of some great creature of times long past or yet to come. Scarlet it was, and rust colored, and through it ran great streaks of ruby: it glittered in the moonlight of the many moons, standing as a twisted monument to the Blood Planet's blatant savagery. Before it, Alan paused, confused by such an obstruction; finally, with a sigh, he sat down, leaned against a bulwark of magenta stone, and gazed at his footprints in the sand—footprints which wandered aimlessly back into an eternity of distance, time, and dreams . . .

There had been a spaceport, the best in the universe, full of every entertainment, every joy, every sadness, every perversion—full of mutant pleasures born from the womb of mankind's insidious imagination; there had been great palaces, and towers whose every room held a new pastime, and vast wedges of bar-filled slums, and great amusement parks, and pleasure domes, and racing tracks, and people who would kill you if you wanted to feel that sensation—people, people of every color, size, shape, and mentality; and other things there had been, things they had kept in zoos and things that had run screaming down the crowded streets. Alan had spent five maddening hours in this spaceport, making love and fighting and drinking; then, as he had paused before the Rinky-dink Inn of You Know What, a shabby old man had addressed him: "One two three four, what we doing here for?" The old man had scratched his filthy head, sneezed once, and

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chewed at nothing with his gums; then he had shuffled into the crowd, crying. Alan had paused for a moment, and a thought had crossed his mind: " 'What are we doing here for?' Good question."

Alan felt a pain in his leg; a crab (or something like a crab) was chewing on his knee. Slowly, with much effort, he pulled his leg toward his body, took the predator from its feast, and held it squirming in his hands.

"You only want life, as I, so I won't kill: who to say I better than you? None to say, so I won't kill."

Into the purple waves he threw the crab, which disappeared. Then he stumbled to his feet, circled the great red rock, and shuffled onward, lifting one foot and then the other, progressing, step by step, toward a nebulous cloud of freedom and happiness which his feverish mind could see, but which his eyes were denied: they saw only the beach, the red beach, and the sea, with its crimson waves that no one understood, and the black sky full of moons—only these things, these things of eternal duration on the Blood Planet.

There once had been things of greater duration: the nobility of man's quest into the universe, and the promise of human eternity, which such a noble dissemination seemed to guarantee. There had been the stern wisdom of his instructor at the Academy, a tall man with silver hair and cerulean eyes. "Stars yours," this man had said, and the words had been words of grandeur and meaning: "Stars yours, and greatness good . . ." There had been the Terran uniform, a thing of sky blue and unending beauty, a thing which he had fought for and learned to love. And there had been the upthrusting silhouette of a starship, the indestructible symbol of mankind's outward journey. All these things had been of great duration, but now they were only the blurred fragments of a dissipating memory.

Once, when he had been on leave, he had met a blind man, a lutist named Blue, who had lost his sight somewhere beyond Betelgeuse. They had met in the lounge of a luxury spaceliner, whose great glass eye had revealed the boundless nothingness of the universe through which they had been drifting perilously, somewhere between two suns. It had seemed ironic to Alan that opulence and vacuum should be so strangely separated, as they were, by only a thin, transparent membrane. The lutist—a twisted man, heavy in the limbs and slender in the body, endowed with a mane of snowy white hair—had agreed, smiling hesitantly and licking his lips with the very tip of his tongue.

"You play chess? Despite blindness, I can play imagining board. It game excellent."

"Indeed."

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They had played, Alan using a board, the lutist only his mind.

"Why you venture to stars?"

"It important," answered Alan. "Important fine."

"Importance only judgment subjective. You find never importance absolute—importance absolute not."

"Still — importance personal meaningful."

"Yes, meaningful—but also transient. Importance today, nothingness tomorrow: man fat, ghost thin."

"Or no ghost."

"Yes—or no ghost . . . .

Ghosts there were now, foul spectres of the beach, flitting about his drunken head and singing his death song. With a dessicated laugh-rattle, he drank the last half-ounce of his water supply. Behind him was an insane path of footprints and belly furrows. Ahead of him was another path, less insane, certainly, but far more terrible: he had come full circuit and reached the spot where his journey had begun. The ocean was a lake, and he had circled it. With a whispered shriek, Alan stumbled forward and touched the broken hull of what had once been a starship. He lifted shards of metal in his hands, and mixed with the metal were the bones of his shipmates . . .

They had landed on the beach and alighted in the endless night of the Blood Planet. The air had been good, and they had stood in helmetless glory, glad to be men, strong as gods, the conquerors of the stars. Then the skirling drum music of the nitramlig horde had floated over the horizon, and the men of Earth had cringed. As a child fears the shadows of a dark room, so they had feared the song of the nitramligs, the song which had joined the drum and had slid over the red horizon, a tongue of alien sound. Finally, holding their banners high in the black sky, the nitramligs had come: by the hundreds they fell, but by the thousands did they come. Only Alan Bronson had escaped—escaped for the sole purpose of encircling, in seven days, a lake of blood, only to come once more upon the scene of his shipmates' destruction . . . .

Having run into the last blind alley, having found his ignoble end, Alan sank to the sand of the red beach which is forever drenched by the pulse of the purple sea which is forever silvered by the light of the nine hundred and thirty moons. He slept.

At the outset of the following day, a spaceship came. When the hands of his fellow men gently shook him awake, he rolled onto his back and gazed wisely at nothing. After a moment, he addressed them: "One two three four, what we doing here for?" Then he scratched his filthy head, sneezed once, and rolled over, where he lay face down in the sand, crying . . .

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It was pure chance that the alien with the wonderful gift for mankind should have come first to Dr. Kelly in quiet little Millville. Would the end result have been different if he'd gone first to a doctor in some other town?

SHOTGUN CURE

by Clifford D. Simak

THE CLINICS WERE SET UP AND in the morning they'd start on Operation Kelly—and that was something, wasn't it, that they should call it Kelly!

He sat in the battered rocking chair on the sagging porch and said it once again and rolled it on his tongue, but the taste of it was not so sharp nor sweet as it once had been, when that great London doctor had risen in the United Nations to suggest it could be called nothing else but Kelly.

Although, when one came to think of it, there was a deal of happenstance. It needn't have been Kelly. It could have been just anyone at all with an M.D. to his name. It could as well have been Cohen or Johnson or Radzonovich or any other of them—any one of all the doctors in the world.

He rocked gently in the creaking chair while the floor boards of the porch groaned in sympathy, and in the gathering dusk were the sounds, as well, of children at the day's-end play, treasuring those last seconds before they had to go inside and soon thereafter to bed.

There was the scent of lilacs in the coolness of the air and at the corner of the garden he could faintly see the white flush of an early-blooming bridal wreath—the one that Martha Anderson had given him and Janet so many years ago, when they first had come to live in this very house.

A neighbor came tramping down the walk and he could not make him out in the deepening dusk, but the man called out to him.

"Good evening, Doc," he said.

"Good evening, Hiram," said old Doc Kelly, knowing who it was by the voice of him.

The neighbor went on, tramping down the walk.

Old Doc kept up his gentle rocking with his hands folded on his

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pudgy stomach and from inside the house he could hear the bustling in the kitchen as Janet cleared up after supper. In a little while, perhaps, she'd come out and sit with him and they'd talk together, low-voiced and casually, as befitted an old couple very much in love.

Although, by rights, he shouldn't stay out here on the porch. There was the medical journal waiting for him on the study desk and he should be reading it. There was so much new stuff these days that a man should keep up with—although, perhaps, the way things were turning out it wouldn't really matter if a man kept up or not.

Maybe in the years to come there'd be precious little a man would need to keep up with.

Of course, there'd always be need of doctors. There'd always be damn fools smashing up their cars and shooting one another and getting fishhooks in their hands and falling out of trees. And there'd always be the babies.

He rocked gently to and fro and thought of all the babies and how some of them had grown until they were men and women now and had babies of their own. And he thought of Martha Anderson, Janet's closest friend, and he thought of old Con Gilbert, as ornery an old shikepoke as ever walked the earth, and tight with money, too. He chuckled a bit wryly, thinking of all the money Con Gilbert finally owed him, never having paid a bill in his entire life.

But that was the way it went. There were some who paid and others who made no pretense of paying, and that was why he and Janet lived in this old house and he drove a five-year car and Janet had worn the self-same dress to church the blessed winter long.

Although it made no difference, really, once one considered it. For the important pay was not in cash.

There were those who paid and those who didn't pay. And there were those who lived and the other ones who died, no matter what you did. There was hope for some and the ones who had no hope—and some of these you told and there were others that you didn't.

But it was different now.

And it all had started right here in this little town of Millville—not much more than a year ago.

Sitting in the dark, with the lilac scent and the white blush of the bridal wreath and the muted sounds of children clasping to themselves the last minutes of their play, he remembered it.

It was almost 8:30 and he could hear Martha Anderson in the outer office talking to Miss Lane and she, he knew, had been the last of them.

He took off his white jacket, folding it absent-mindedly,

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fogged with weariness, and laid it across the examination table.

Janet would be waiting supper, but she'd never say a word, for she never had. All these many years she had never said a word of reproach to him, although there had been at times a sense of disapproval at his easy-going ways, at his keeping on with patients who didn't even thank him, much less pay their bills. And a sense of disapproval, too, at the hours he kept, at his willingness to go out of nights when he could just as well have let a call go till his regular morning rounds.

She would be waiting supper and she would know that Martha had been in to see him and she'd ask him how she was, and what was he to tell her?

He heard Martha going out and the sharp click of Miss Lane's heels across the outer office. He moved slowly to the basin and turned on the tap, picking up the soap.

He heard the door creak open and did not turn his head.

"Doctor," said Miss Lane, "Martha thinks she's fine. She says you're helping her. Do you think . . ."

"What would you do," he asked.

"I don't know," she said.

"Would you operate, knowing it was hopeless? Would you send her to a specialist, knowing that he couldn't help her, knowing she can't pay him and that she'll worry about not paying? Would you tell her that she has, perhaps, six months to live and take from her the little happiness and hope she still has left to her?"

"I am sorry, doctor."

"No need to be. I've faced it many times. No case is the same. Each one calls for a decision of its own. It's been a long, hard day . . ."

"Doctor, there's another one out there."

"Another patient?"

"A man. He just came in. His name is Harry Herman."

"Herman? I don't know any Hermans."

"He's a stranger," said Miss Lane. "Maybe he just moved into town."

"If he'd moved in," said Doc, "I'd have heard of it. I hear everything."

"Maybe he's just passing through. Maybe he got sick driving on the road."

"Well, send him in," said Doc, reaching for a towel. "I'll have a look at him."

The nurse turned to the door.

"And Miss Lane."

"Yes?"

"You may as well go home. There's no use sticking round. It's been a real bad day."

And it had been, at that, he thought. A fracture, a burn, a cut, a dropsy, a menopause, a pregnancy, two pelvics, a scattering of

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colds, a feeding schedule, two teethings, a suspicious lung, a possible gallstone, a cirrhosis of the liver and Martha Anderson. And now, last of all, this man named Harry Herman—no name that he knew and when one came to think of it, a rather funny name.

And he was a funny man. Just a bit too tall and willowy to be quite believable, ears too tight against his skull, lips so thin they seemed no lips at all.

"Doctor?" he asked, standing in the doorway.

"Yes," said Doc, picking up his jacket and shrugging into it. "Yes, I am the doctor. Come on in. What can I do for you?"

"I am not ill," said the man.

"Not ill?"

"But I want to talk to you. You have time, perhaps?"

"Yes, certainly," said Doc, knowing that he had no time and resenting this intrusion. "Come on in. Sit down."

He tried to place the accent, but was unable to. Central European, most likely.

"Technical," said the man. "Professional."

"What do you mean?" asked Doc, getting slightly nettled.

"I talk to you technical. I talk professional.

"You mean that you're a doctor?"

"Not exactly," said the man, "although perhaps you think so. I should tell you immediate that I am an alien."

"An alien," said Old Doc. "We've got lots of them around. Mostly refugees."

"Not what I mean. Not that kind of alien. From some other planet. From some other star."

"But you said your name was Herman . . ."

"When in Rome," said the other one, "you must do as Romans."

"Huh?" asked Doc, and then: "Good God, do you mean that? That you are an alien. By an alien, do you mean . . ."

The other nodded happily. "From some other planet. From some other star. Very many light-years."

"Well, I be dammed," said Doc.

He stood there looking at the alien and the alien grinned back at him, but uncertainly.

"You think, perhaps," the alien said, "but he is so human!"

"That," said Doc, "was going through my mind."

"So you would have a look, perhaps. You would know a human body."

"Perhaps," said Doc grimly, not liking it at all. "But the human body can take some funny turns."

"But not a turn like this," said the stranger, showing him his hands.

"No," said the shocked Old Doc. "No such turn as that."

For the hand had two thumbs and a single finger, almost as if a

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bird claw had decided to turn into a hand.

"Nor like this?" asked the other, standing up and letting down his trousers.

"Nor like that," said Doc, more shaken than he'd been in many years of practice.

"Then," said the alien, zipping up his trousers, "I think that it is settled."

He sat down again and calmly crossed his knees.

"If you mean I accept you as an alien," said Doc, "I suppose I do. Although it's not an easy thing."

"I suppose it is not. It comes as quite a shock."

Doc passed a hand across his brow. "Yes, a shock, of course. But there are other points. . ."

"You mean the language," said the alien. "And my knowledge of your customs."

"That's part of it, naturally."

"We've studied you," the alien said. "We've spent some time on you. Not you alone, of course . . ."

"But you talk so well," protested Doc. "Like a well-educated foreigner."

"And that, of course," the other said, "is what exactly I am."

"Why, yes, I guess you are," said Doc. "I hadn't thought of it."

"I am not glib," said the alien. "I know a lot of words, but I use them incorrect. And my vocabulary is restricted to just the common speech. On matters of great technicality, I will not be proficient."

Doc walked around behind his desk and sat down rather limply.

"All right," he said, "let's have the rest of it. I accept you as an alien. Now tell me the other answer. Just why are you here?"

And he was surprised beyond all reason that he could approach the situation as calmly as he had. In a little while, he knew, when he had time to think it over, he would get the shakes.

"You're a doctor," said the alien. "You are a healer of your race."

"Yes," said Doc. "I am one of many healers."

"You work very hard to make the unwell well. You mend the broken flesh. You hold off death . . ."

"We try. Sometimes we don't succeed."

"You have many ailments. You have the cancer and the heart attacks and colds and many other things—I do not find the word."

"Diseases," Doc supplied.

"Disease. That is it. You will pardon my shortcomings in the tongue."

"Let's cut out the niceties," suggested Doc. "Let's get on with it."

"It is not right," the alien said, "to have all these diseases. It is not nice. It is an awful thing."

"We have less than we had at one time. We've licked a lot of them."

"And, of course," the alien said, "you make your living with them."

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"What's that you said!" yelped Doc.

"You will be tolerant of me if I misunderstand. An economic system is a hard thing to get into one's head."

"I know what you mean," growled Doc, "but let me tell you, sir . . ."

But what was the use of it, he thought. This being was thinking the self-same thing that many humans thought.

"I would like to point out to you," he said, starting over once again, "that the medical profession is working hard to conquer those diseases you are talking of. We are doing all we can to destroy our own jobs."

"That is fine," the alien said, "It is what I thought, but it did not square with your planet's business sense. I take it, then, you would not be averse to seeing all disease destroyed."

"Now, look here," said Doc, having had enough of it, "I don't know what you are getting at. But I am hungry and I am tired and if you want to sit here threshing out philosophies . . ."

"Philosophies," said the alien. "Oh, not philosophies. I am practical. I have come to offer an end of all disease."

They sat in silence for a moment, then Doc stirred half protestingly and said, "Perhaps I misunderstood you, but I thought you said . . ."

"I have a method, a development, a find—I do not catch the word—that will destroy all diseases."

"A vaccine," said Old Doc.

"That's the word. Except it is different in some ways than the vaccine you are thinking."

"Cancer?" Doc asked.

The alien nodded. "Cancer and the common cold and all the others of them. You name it and it's gone."

"Heart," said Doc. "You can't vaccinate for heart."

"That, too," the alien said. "It does not really vaccinate. It makes the body strong. It makes the body right. Like tuning up a motor and making it like new. The motor will wear out in time, but it will function until it is worn out entirely."

Doc stared hard at the alien. "Sir," he said, "this is not the sort of thing one should joke about."

"I am not joking," said the alien.

"And this vaccine—it will work on humans? It has no side effects?"

"I am sure it will. We have studied your—your—the way your bodies work."

"Metabolism is the word you want."

"Thank you," said the alien.

"And the price?" asked Doc.

"There is no price," the alien said. "We are giving it to you."

"Completely free of charge? Surely there must be . . ."

"Without any charge," the alien said. "Without any strings."

He got up from the chair. He

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took a flat box from his pocket and walked over to the desk. He placed it upon the desk and presssed its side and the top sprang open. Inside of it were pads—like surgical pads, but they were not made of cloth.

Doc reached out, then halted his hand just above the box.

"May I?" he asked.

"Yes, certainly. You only touch the tops."

Doc gingerly lifted out one of the pads and laid it on the desk. He kneaded it with a skittish finger and there was liquid in the pad. He could feel the liquid squish as he pressed the pad.

He turned it over carefully and the underside of it was rough and corrugated, as if it were a mouthful of tiny, vicious teeth.

"You apply the rough side to the body of the patient," said the alien. "It seizes on the patient. It becomes a part of him. The body absorbs the vaccine and the pad drops off."

"And that is all there's to it?"

"That is all," the alien said.

Doc lifted the pad between two cautious fingers and dropped it back into the box.

He looked up at the alien. "But why?" he asked. "Why are you giving this to us?"

"You do not know," the alien said. "You really do not know."

"No, I don't," said Doc.

The alien's eyes suddenly were old and weary and he said: "In another million years you will."

"Not me," said Doc.

"In another million years," the alien said, "you'll do the same yourself, but it will be something different. And then someone will ask you, and you won't be able to answer any more than I am now."

If it was a rebuke, it was a very gentle one. Doc tried to decide if it were or not. He let the matter drop.

"Can you tell me what is in it?" he asked, gesturing at the pad.

"I can give you the descriptive formula, but it would be in our terms. It would be gibberish."

"You won't be offended if I try these out?"

"I'd be disappointed if you didn't," said the alien. "I would not expect your faith to extend so far. It would be simple minded."

He shut the box and pushed it closer to Old Doc. He turned and strode toward the door.

Doc rose ponderously to his feet.

"Now, wait a minute there!" he bellowed.

"I'll see you in a week or two," the alien said.

He went out and closed the door behind him.

Doc sat down suddenly in the chair and stared at the box upon the desk.

He reached out and touched it and it was really there. He pressed the side of it and the lid popped open and the pads were there, inside.

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He tried to fight his way back to sanity, to conservative and solid ground, to a proper—and a human—viewpoint.

"It's all hogwash," he said.

But it wasn't hogwash. He knew good and well it wasn't.

He fought it out with himself that night behind the closed door of his study, hearing faintly the soft bustling in the kitchen as Janet cleared away from supper.

And the first fight was on the front of credibility.

He had told the man he believed he was an alien and there was evidence that he could not ignore. Yet it seemed so incredible, all of it, every bit of it, that it was hard to swallow.

And the hardest thing of all was that this alien, whoever he might be, had come, of all the doctors in the world, to Dr. Jason Kelly, a little one horse doctor in a little one horse town.

He debated whether it might be a hoax and decided that it wasn't, for the three digits on the hand and that other thing he'd seen would have been difficult to simulate. And the whole thing, as a hoax, would be so stupid and so cruel that it simply made no sense. Besides, no one hated him enough to go to all the work. And even granting a hatred of appropriate proportion, he doubted there was anyone in Millville imaginative enough to think of this.

So the only solid ground he had, he told himself, was to assume that the man had been really an alien and that the pads were *bona fide*.

And if that was true, there was only one procedure: He must test the pads.

He rose from his chair and paced up and down the floor.

Martha Anderson, he told himself. Martha Anderson had cancer and her life was forfeit—there was nothing in man's world or knowledge that had a chance to save her. Surgery was madness, for she'd probably not survive it. And even if she did, her case was too advanced. The killer that she carried had already broken loose and was swarming through her body and there was no hope for her.

Yet he could not bring himself to do it, for she was Janet's closest friend and she was old and poor and every instinct in him screamed against his using her as a guinea pig.

Now if it were only old Con Gilbert—he could do a thing like that to Con. It would be no more than the old skinflint rightly had coming to him. But old Con was too mean to be really sick; despite all the complaining that he did, he was healthy as a hog.

No matter what the alien had said about no side effects, he told himself, one could not be sure. He had said they'd studied the metabolism of the human race and yet,

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on the face of it, it seemed impossible.

The answer, he knew, was right there any time he wanted it. It was tucked away back in his brain and he knew that it was there, but he pretended that it wasn't and he kept it tucked away and refused to haul it forth.

But after an hour or so of pacing up and down the room and of batting out his brains, he finally gave up and let the answer out.

He was quite calm when he rolled up his sleeve and opened up the box. And he was a matter-of-fact physician when he lifted out the pad and slapped it on his arm.

But his hand was shaking when he rolled down the sleeve so Janet wouldn't see the pad and ask a lot of questions about what had happened to his arm.

Tomorrow all over the world outside Millville, people would line up before the clinic doors, with their sleeves rolled up and ready. The lines, most likely, would move at a steady clip, for there was little to it. Each person would pass before a doctor and the doctor would slap a pad onto his or her arm and the next person would step up.

All over the world, thought Doc, in every cranny of it, in every little village; none would be overlooked. Even the poor, he thought, for there would be no charge.

And one could put his finger on a certain date and say: "This was the day in history when disease came to an end."

For the pads not only would kill the present ailments, but would guard against them in the future.

And every twenty years the great ships out of space would come, carrying other cargoes of the pads and there would be another Vaccination Day. But not so many then—only the younger generation. For once a person had been vaccinated, there was no further need of it. Vaccinated once and you were set for life.

Doc tapped his foot quietly on the floor of the porch to keep the rocker going. It was pleasant here, he thought. And tomorrow it would be pleasant in the entire world. Tomorrow the fear would have been largely filtered out of human life. After tomorrow, short of accident or violence, men could look forward confidently to living out their normal lifetimes. And, more to the point, perhaps, completely healthy lifetimes.

The night was quiet, for the children finally had gone in, giving up their play. And he was tired. Finally, he thought, he could admit that he was tired. There was now, after many years, no treason in saying he was tired.

Inside the house he heard the muffled purring of the phone and the sound of it broke the rhythm

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of his rocking, brought him forward to the chair's edge.

Janet's feet made soft sounds as they moved toward the phone and he thrilled to the gentleness of her voice as she answered it.

Now, in just a minute, she would call him and he'd get up and go inside.

But she didn't call him. Her voice went on talking.

He settled back into the chair.

He'd forgotten once again.

The phone no longer was an enemy. It no longer haunted him.

For Millville had been the first. The fear had already been lifted here. Millville had been the guinea pig, the pilot project.

Martha Anderson had been the first of them and after her Ted Carson, whose lung had been suspicious, and after him the Jurgens' baby when it came down with pneumonia. And a couple of dozen others until all the pads were gone.

And the alien had come back.

And the alien had said—what was it he had said?

"Don't think of us as benefactors nor as supermen. We are neither one. Think of me if you will, as the man across the street."

And it had been, Doc told himself, a reaching by the alien for an understanding, an attempt to translate this thing that they were doing into a common idiom.

And had there been any understanding—any depth of understanding? Doc doubted that there had been.

Although, he recalled, the aliens had been basically very much like humans. They could even joke.

There had been one joking thing the original alien had said that had stuck inside his mind. And it had been a sort of silly thing, silly on the face of it, but it had bothered him.

The screen door banged behind Janet as she came out on the porch. She sat down in the glider.

"That was Martha Anderson," she said.

Doc chuckled to himself. Martha lived just five doors up the street and she and Janet saw one another a dozen times a day and yet Martha had to phone.

"What did Martha want?" he asked.

Janet laughed. "She wanted help with rolls."

"You mean her famous rolls?"

"Yes. She couldn't remember for the life of her, how much yeast she used."

Doc chortled softly. "And those are the ones, I suppose, she wins all the prizes on at the county fair."

Janet said, crisply: "It's not so funny as you make it, Jason. It's easy to forget a thing like that. She does a lot of baking."

"Yes, I suppose you're right," said Doc.

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He should be getting in, he told himself, and start reading in the journal. And yet he didn't want to. It was so pleasant sitting here—just sitting. It had been a long time since he could do much sitting.

And it was all right with him, of course, because he was getting old and close to worn out, but it wouldn't be all right with a younger doctor, one who still owed for his education and was just starting out. There was talk in the United Nations of urging all the legislative bodies to consider medical subsidies to keep the doctors going. For there still was need of them. Even with all diseases vanished, there still was need of them. It wouldn't do to let their ranks thin out, for there would be time and time again when they would be badly needed.

He'd been listening to the footsteps for quite a while, coming down the street, and now all at once they were turning in the gate.

He sat up straighter in his chair.

Maybe it was a patient, knowing he'd be home, coming in to see him.

"Why," said Janet, considerably surprised, "it is Mr. Gilbert."

It was Con Gilbert, sure enough.

"Good evening, Doc," said Con. "Good evening, Miz Kelly."

"Good evening," Janet said, getting up to go.

"No use of you to leave," Con said to her.

"I have some things to do," she told him. "I was just getting ready to go in."

Con came up the steps and sat down on the glider.

"Nice evening," he declared.

"It is all of that," said Doc.

"Nicest spring I've ever seen," said Con, working his way around to what he had to say.

"I was thinking that," said Doc. "It seems to me the lilacs never smelled so good before."

"Doc," said Con, "I figure I owe you quite a bit of money."

"You owe me some," said Doc.

"You got an idea how much it might be?"

"Not the faintest," Doc told him. "I never bothered to keep track of it."

"Figured it was a waste of time," said Con. "Figured I would never pay it."

"Something like that," Doc agreed.

"Been doctoring with you for a right long time," said Con.

"That's right, Con."

"I got three hundred here. You figure that might do it?"

"Let's put it this way, Con," said Doc. "I'd settle for a whole lot less."

"I guess, then, that sort of makes us even. Seems to me three hundred might be close to fair."

"If you say so," said Doc.

Con dug out his billfold, ex-

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tracted a wad of bills and handed them across. Doc took them and folded them and stuffed them in his pocket.

"Thank you, Con," he said.

And suddenly he had a funny feeling, as if there were something he should know, as if there were something that he should be able to just reach out and grab.

But he couldn't, no matter how he tried, figure what it was.

Con got up and shuffled across the porch, heading for the steps.

"Be seeing you around," he said.

Doc jerked himself back to reality.

"Sure, Con. Be seeing you around. And thanks."

He sat in the chair, not rocking, and listened to Con going down the walk and out the gate and then down the street until there was only silence.

And if he ever was going to get at it, he'd have to go in now and start reading in the journal.

Although, more than likely, it was all damn foolishness. He'd probably never again need to know a thing out of any medic journal.

Doc pushed the journal to one side and sat there, wondering what was wrong with him. He'd been reading for twenty minutes and none of it had registered. He couldn't have told a word that he had read.

Too upset, he thought. Too excited about Operation Kelly, and wasn't that a thing to call it—Operation Kelly!

And he remembered it once again exactly.

How he'd tried it out on Millville, then gone to the county medical association and how the doctors in the county, after some slight amount of scoffing and a good deal of skepticism, had become convinced. And from there it had gone to state and the AMA.

And finally that great day in the United Nations, when the alien had appeared before the delegates and when he, himself, had been introduced—and at last the great London man arising to suggest that the project could be called nothing else but Kelly.

A proud moment, he told himself—and he tried to call up the pride again, but it wasn't there, not the whole of it. Never in his life again would he know that kind of pride.

And here he sat, a simple country doctor once again, in his study late at night, trying to catch up with reading he never seemed to get the time to do.

Although that was no longer strictly true. Now he had all the time there was.

He reached out and pulled the journal underneath the lamp and settled down to read.

But it was slow going.

He went back and read a paragraph anew.

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And that, he told himself, was not the way it should be.

Either he was getting old or his eyes were going bad or he was plain stupid.

And that was the word—that was the key to the thing that it had seemed he should have been able to just reach out and grab.

Stupid!

Probably not actually stupid. Maybe just a little slow. Not really less intelligent, but not so sharp and bright as he had been. Not so quick to catch the hang of things.

Martha Anderson had forgotten how much yeast to use in those famous, prize-winning rolls of hers. And that was something that Martha should never have forgotten.

Con had paid his bill, and on the scale of values that Con had subscribed to all his life, that was plain stupidity. The bright thing, the sharp thing would have been for Con, now that he'd probably never need a doctor, just to forget the obligation. After all, it would not have been hard to do; he'd been forgetful of it up to this very night.

And the alien had said something that, at the time, he'd thought of as a joke.

"Never fear," the alien had said, "we'll cure all your ills. Including, more than likely, a few you don't suspect."

And was intelligence a disease?

It was hard to think of it as such.

And yet, when any race was as obsessed with intelligence as Man, was, it might be classed as one.

When it ran rampant as it had during the last half century, when it piled progress on top of progress, technology on top of technology, when it ran so fast that no man caught his breath, then it might be disease.

Not quite so sharp, thought Doc. Not quite so quick to grasp the meaning of a paragraph loaded with medical terminology—being forced to go a little slower to pack it in his mind.

And was that really bad?

Some of the stupidest people he'd ever known, he told himself, had been the happiest.

And while one could not make out of that a brief for planned stupidity, it at least might be a plea for a less harrassed humanity.

He pushed the journal to one side and sat staring at the light.

It would be felt in Millville first because Millville had been the pilot project. And six months from tomorrow night it would be felt in all the world.

How far would it go, he wondered—for that, after all, was the vital question.

Only slightly less sharp?

Back to bumbling?

Clear back to the ape?

There was no way one could tell. . . .

And all he had to do to stop it was pick up the phone.

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He sat there, frozen with the thought that perhaps Operation Kelly should be stopped—that after all the years of death and pain and misery, Man must buy it back.

But the aliens, he thought—the aliens would not let it go too far. Whoever they might be, he believed they were decent people.

Maybe there had been no basic understanding, no meeting of the minds, and yet there had been a common ground—the very simple ground of compassion for the blind and halt.

But if he were wrong, he wondered—what if the aliens proposed to limit Man's powers of self-destruction even if that meant reducing him to abject stupidity . . . what was the answer then? And what if the plan was to soften man up before invasion?

Sitting there, he knew.

Knew that no matter what the odds were against his being right, there was nothing he could do.

Realized that as a judge in a matter such as this he was unqualified, that he was filled with bias, and could not change himself.

He'd been a doctor for too long to stop Operation Kelly.

Coming next month . . .

Brian Aldiss returns to these pages with a new novelet—the first of a series—titled "Hothouse." It is a science fantasy about a time in the far future when the Earth has been largely conquered by a tropical jungle, a rioting profusion of plant life which has killed off most animal forms, and reduced the few human beings left to a minimum role in the ecology. An imaginative and different sort of tale you won't want to miss. . . . Also, we'll bring you a novelet by Marcel Ayme, "The Ubiquitous Wife," translated by Whit Burnett . . . and a variety of other good things, including, of course, Isaac Asimov on science, and Alfred Bester on books.

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Udine was a planet of green snow and good farmland, and the aborigine natives were easy to get along with—they left the colonists strictly alone. Until the day 13 years after the landing, when one of them said, "You must leave now."

RETURN JOURNEY

by Charles V. De Vet

PROLOG

FOR NEARLY THIRTY SIX HOURS, the colonists in and about the giant space ship waited with stolid patience, while their leaders conferred with the planet Udine's aborigine natives.

Virgil Simmons was fourteen years old, an awkward age. Too young to be accepted as an equal by the elders, and too old to play in the green snow with the youngsters.

On the afternoon of the second day the three colony negotiators returned to the ship. They were solemn, but not for long. Their faces broke into smiles as one of them exclaimed, "They've agreed to let us stay!"

The colonists shouted and cheered. Virgil Simmons forgot his hard-gained dignity and joined in a green snowball fight.

They had found their new home!

Thirteen years later the green snow once again swirled about Simmons. Udine snow. A fragrant, resin-scented snow. Everything on Udine bore some shade of green. The planet was located in the constellation of Cancer, and circled the green sun Zubenes-Chamali. It was the only green star visible from Earth.

Simmons had come up into the hills looking for snow hens, but the gun in his hand was forgotten now. On the ski trail ahead a Udine native had emerged from the background of desolate wintery landscape.

The event was rare enough to arouse Simmons' expectant curiosity. In the years the colony had been here the natives—Jaates, they called themselves—had contacted them only very rarely. There was no hostility between the two races, merely a reserved indifference on the part of the humanoid natives. They were a strange peo-

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ple, and the colonists knew little about them.

The alien glided toward Simmons on feet that appeared large and clumsy, but which touched the snow only lightly. They were probably lighter of bone than Earthmen. The Jaate stopped a few yards from Simmons. His angular seven-foot body was clad in the skin of a native yak-like animal they bred for milk, meat, and hide. A skin bag suspended from a cord about his neck served as a carryall.

"You must leave now." The Jaate spoke harshly, with small lip movement. His Earthian was surprisingly good, though the vowel sounds came out somewhat strangely.

"I beg your pardon?" Searching for the emotion back of the command, Simmons studied the Jaate.

All the aborgine's features were oversize. His head was large and craggy, with lidless eyes buried deep in his skull, and long soft-cartileged ears covering the entire sides of his head. The fair skin was darkened by a flush of blood just beneath the surface.

Yet there was nothing ludicrous about him. Dignity and character were there—and something deeper: a kind of unostentatious assurance that conveyed the impression of great strength. There was no sign of emotion.

"When the sunny years become clouded, patience must end." The Jaates were fond of speaking metaphorically. Their "sunny years" legend was one of the mysteries that puzzled the colonists. They apparently believed they were able to stop the aging process when they reached the time of life most compatible to each. And with the limited intermingling, no Earthman had ever been able to prove them wrong.

"Why must I leave?" Simmons asked. "What have I done?"

The Jaate's long narrow face broke on both sides of its one-nostriled nose. "You must all go! You must leave our world!"

"Leave your world?" For the moment Simmons was unable to absorb the full significance of what the other had said. "Why?" he asked again, in protest.

"We agreed you could stay in the river delta," (now Simmons was certain he read anger in the Jaate's voice), "but you have gone beyond. You must leave."

Simmons stirred the snow with one ski as he searched for an argument. "Why do you tell me?" he asked. "I'm not in charge here."

"Who knows the ways of the outlanders? You will take my words to those in authority." The native moved a few steps away. "We will meet here tomorrow."

"Wait . . ." Simmons was too late. The Jaate was already twenty yards away. In a moment he vanished in the wind driven snow.

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Another mystery. The Jaates appeared to move casually, yet covered distance with incredible speed. No human was able to explain how it was done.

The colony settlement had originally paralleled the river banks, but in later years had expanded on both sides. The first houses had been replaced by stores and other places of business. Homes had been moved farther back, and beyond them were the farms, stretching to the sides of the valley that bounded the river mouth. Now over twenty thousand people lived in the seventy square mile area.

Simmons crossed the green crust of the river, passing two boys fishing through the ice, and went directly to the city administration building. The old wooden structure had been replaced by one of marble that towered five stories high. The office of Thomas Reget, colony governor, was on the first floor. Simmons went in.

Reget looked up as Simmons entered. "Good hunting, Virgil?" He was a big man, bluff and extraverted. An excellent administrator, but short on diplomacy. He had been out from Earth about two years now.

"I didn't do much hunting." Simmons took a seat to the left of Reget's desk and stretched out his long legs. "I met one of the Jaates today. He told me we have to get off Udine."

Reget's eyebrows raised. "He did, eh? And what did you tell him?"

"What could I?"

"You could've told him to go salve his belly," Reget growled.

"I wouldn't take his warning lightly."

"You wouldn't . . . Damn it, Simmons. How am I supposed to take it? Tell everybody to pack up, that we're going back home?"

"I don't know the answer," Simmons replied. "I wish I did."

"But you do take it seriously?"

"Very much so."

"The Jaate spoke for his entire race, I suppose?"

"It's always been that way."

"What's his complaint?"

"It seems that when we first came here we agreed to stay within the boundaries of the river delta. We haven't kept that agreement."

Reget considered for a minute. "Other than a few small mines in the hills, we have. Oh yes, and the marble quarry."

"We opened those several years ago," Simmons said. "I believe he had in mind the farm land above the northeast corner. That was cultivated for the first time last summer. Several of the farmers have their homes there too."

Reget grunted irritably. "Virgil, we have to expand. This colony is growing. There's no longer room enough for us in the valley."

"I realize that. But I'm afraid the argument wouldn't carry much weight with the Jaates."

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"What would you suggest?"

Simmons shrugged noncommittally.

Reget rose, kicking his chair to one side. "This looks to me like a case of blackmail, Virgil. You go back and find out what the fellow wants. Give it to him, if he doesn't ask for too much. If he does, give him some plain talk instead. Let him know we want to be good neighbors, but that we don't intend to be pushed around. That should straighten him out."

"It won't be that simple."

"We don't have anything he wants?"

"That's about it."

"Look, Virgil . . ." Reget sat down again. "The policy of Earth is to get along with aliens. It's true we won't colonize a world without the consent of its natives, and I'll admit we made certain commitments here. But that was thirteen years ago, and it's too late to go back now." Reget slapped his desk with the flat of his hand. "We're staying, and that's final. If the Jaates start trouble, it'll be their own doing. I hate to think what we'd have to do to them if they come at us with their knives and lances. You go back there tomorrow and remind your friend of that."

The next afternoon, as Simmons reluctantly packed his gear, John Harpley the colony ethnologist, came into the yard. He had hiking skis trapped to his back. "Reget thought you might like me to go with you." He added, smiling a bit self-consciously, "I'm supposed to be the leading authority on the Jaates, you know."

"Glad to have you," Simmons assured him. "Lord knows I can use any help I get." He had considerable respect for Harpley's intelligence.

A stray mongrel dog followed them up the street past the Masonic Lodge as they started out. Harpley was quiet, obviously feeling himself an intruder, despite Simmons' reassurance.

"On the surface the Jaates seem like quite ordinary aborigines," Simmons tried again to put Harpley at ease. "But the more I see of them the less I understand them."

"That's a fact!" He had touched Harpley's major field of interest and the man became instantly voluble. "All gregarious races have certain common characteristics—'learned' or 'social' virtues, we call them—necessary for their survival and the function of their communities. These include respect for law and authority, cooperation, a sense of duty to other members, perhaps even compassion and tenderness—all the do-as-you-would-be-done-to virtues. In that way the Jaates and humans, both being gregarious, are alike. It's in the more basic characteristics that they differ." He hesitated and glanced at Simmons.

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"Go on," Simmons prompted.

"The basic characteristics of a race are less obvious than the social characteristics—farther beneath the surface. They might include instincts, sexual patterns, family relations, special abilities, and so forth. These are harder to detect."

"I think there's more to it than that, John." They had reached the edge of town by this time and stopped by a small graveyard to buckle on their skis. "I remember one time," Simmons went on, "shortly after we landed here. I had been out in the hills, and I lost my way and wandered into one of their villages. They were more friendly then, if you remember. It seems they were about to have a funeral. One of the Jaates, quite young, was wandering about rubbing cheeks with the others. After awhile I understood that he was the one about to be buried."

Simmons paused and took a deep breath. "I still can hardly believe what I saw. The young Jaate lay down, and for a moment something else caught my attention. When I looked back, he had become an old, old man. And he'd stopped breathing. He was dead."

"I've heard of that," Harpley said. "Naturally I've given this power, or gift, of theirs considerable thought," he said. "And I've decided that it doesn't always operate the same way. In your illustration it was purely a personal thing, affecting no one except the Jaate who allowed himself to die. However, in other instances it also affects others. Once I was standing on a hill; below me, about a quarter mile away, I could see a Jaate walking along the river. Just as he reached the edge of a stand of timber I spotted one of the big striped cats on a branch above his path. I shouted a warning, but he was too far away to hear me. The cat sprang, and landed on his back. I could see it clawing savagely at the Jaate.

"I ran down into the woods toward them. Something very odd happened then. I know I didn't get lost or go in a circle, and I'm certain I ran forward, yet suddenly I found myself at the foot of the hill behind me. I went up the hill and down into the woods again. Finally I reached the spot where the Jaate and the cat had been, but there was no sign of them. A few minutes later I saw a Jaate going over a hill on the far side of the river—and it was the same one I'd seen before. I looked around carefully to make sure, and I found cat tracks—I even climbed the tree, and saw marks of its claws on the tree limb. But there was no evidence of a struggle on the ground. No blood or scuffed up sand. Yet I had seen the cat attack him."

"That's just the sort of thing I mean," Simmons said. "We've all

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witnessed them—yet how can you explain them?"

Harpley shook his head. "I don't know. The explanation of our incidents very probably has to do with something as natural to them as our five senses are to us. Possibly an advanced psi ability."

"I don't quite follow you," Simmons demurred.

"Well, let's say their particular psi-type ability is a conscious control of glandular and cellular functions. That could account for what you saw at the funeral."

"But not for your episode of the Jaate and the cat."

Harpley smiled in concurrence. "If I had a theory that covered everything, I'd have the answer. Now I can only make more or less intelligent guesses."

On the side of a hill ahead, a Jaate waited.

"That's our man?" Harpley asked.

Simmons nodded.

"Should we go . . ." Harpley's voice trailed off as the Jaate moved toward them.

Simmons took over when it became apparent the Jaate waited for them to speak. "Our governor asked that you reconsider," he said.

The Jaate's only reply was a settling of his bleak features.

"Is there anything we can offer, to keep the peace?" Simmons asked.

The Jaate made an impatient gesture with one hand.

"Would you be satisfied if we withdrew back to the delta?" Simmons tried desperately.

"An empty solution. You are children." The Jaate spoke shortly, his voice without patience. "Children to not behave rationally."

Harpley seemed to catch something in the last sentence. "You believe we are not civilized enough?" he asked with interest.

"As a race, you are young. It takes millennia for a people to reach maturity."

"Nowhere in the galaxy have we met a race more advanced than ourselves," Harpley challenged.

The Jaate seemed to be searching for the right words to show he was not being unreasonable. "A child acts without thought for the future," he said. "A young race does the same. You humans breed without restraint, with no concern for your natural limitations. You are despoilers. You exploit and waste your resources, deplete the good soil, and burst out in overpopulation. Until there is not enough for all. Then you must find more living space, or suffer hunger and want. Are those the actions of a mature race?"

"What else can we do?" Harpley asked. His voice had lost its earlier conviction.

"You can develop that which is within you. . . . Now," the

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Jaate said, weary of talk, "we must have your answer."

Simmons spread his hands wide helplessly. Harpley said nothing.

"Then we must act."

As they started back to the settlement, both men were lost in thought. At the rim of the valley, Harpley clutched Simmon's arm. "Look!" He pointed below.

Simmons felt a heavy weight in his stomach, and a taste of brass in the run of saliva in his mouth. Where the farms had been was now only wild, undeveloped terrain!

The ground beneath Simmons' feet lost its solidity, turned fluid. His stricken gaze passed on to the city. It had become curiously dimmed and flattened, without dimension. Even as he watched, the edges of the settlement were shrinking in toward the center. Another minute passed—and the valley was empty. Nothing remained except trees and rock and the land itself.

"My God!" Dully Simmons heard Harpley's half sob, and felt the hurt of Harpley's fingers digging into his arm.

"Virgil!" Harpley's voice was thin and high. "I know the Jaates' secret! Time! They can control . . ." There was a soft implosion of air—and Harpley was gone.

Simmons opened his mouth and cried out without sound . . .

EPILOG

For nearly thirty-six hours, the colonists in and about the giant ship waited with stolid patience, while their leaders conferred with the planet Udine's aborigine natives.

Virgil Simmons was fourteen years old, an awkward age. Too young to be accepted as an equal by the elders, and too old to play in the green snow with the youngsters.

On the afternoon of the second day the three colony negotiators returned to the ship. They were solemn. "They won't permit us to stay," one of them muttered.

Simmons dropped the handful of green snow he held and glanced back at the river valley below. For a moment he had a brief, bright vision of a settlement there. (How vivid it was!) Then his mind blinked clear and he turned and joined the colonists trooping into the ship.

The long journey must go on—they had still to find their new home.

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The best young people emigrated to new worlds, which made it tough on those not good enough to make it. In Jack's case, however, failure was due to feeling inferior. At least that's what they told him. Work hard and believe in yourself, and there'll be no limit to what you can do, they said. Of course, what they had in mind was quite different from what Jack was thinking of. . . .

REHABILITATED

by Gordon R. Dickson

I WENT INTO A BAR.

"Gimme a drink," I said to the bartender.

"Brother, don't take that drink," said a voice at my elbow. I turned and there was a skinny little guy in his fifties. Thin yellow hair and a smile on his face. "Brother, don't take that drink," he said.

I shook him off.

"Where'd you come from?" I said. "You weren't there when I sat down here, one second ago." He just grinned at me.

"Gimme a drink," I said to the bartender.

"Not for you," said the bartender. "You had enough before you came in here." A fat bartender polishing shot glasses with his little finger inside a dishtowel. "Get your friend to take you home."

"He's no friend of mine," I said.

"Brother," said the little man, "come with me."

"I want a drink," I said. An idea struck me. I turned to the little man. "Let's you and I go someplace else and have a drink," I said.

We went out of the bar together; and suddenly we were somewhere else.

After I started to get over it, it wasn't too bad. The first week was bad, but after that it got better. When I found how the little man had trapped me, I tried to get away from the mission or whatever it was he'd taken me to. But after the booze died out I was real weak and sick for a long time. And after that stage was over I got to feeling that maybe I would quit after all. And I started having long talks

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with the little man. His name was Peer Ambrose.

"How old are you, Jack?" he asked me.

"Twenty-six," I said.

He looked at me with tight little brown eyes in his leather-face, grinning.

"Can you run an elevator, Jack?"

"I can run any damn thing!" I said, getting mad.

"Can you, Jack?" he said, not turning a hair.

"Whattayou mean, can I run an elevator?" I shouted at him. "Any flying fool can run an elevator. I can run any damn thing, and you ask me can I run an elevator. Sure I can run an elevator!"

"I have one I'd like you to run for me," he said.

"Well, all right," I said. I didn't mean to yell at him. He didn't seem to be a bad little man; but he was always grinning at me.

So I went to work running the elevator. It wasn't bad. It gave me something to do around the mission or whatever it was. But it wasn't enough to do; and I got bored. I never could understand why they didn't have one of the automatics anyway—any elevator with an operator was a museum piece.

But we were only about half a mile from the spaceport and when there wasn't anything doing, I'd take the elevator up to the transparent weather bubble that opened on the roof garden and watch the commuters and the sky with its clouds and the big ships taking off all sharp and black like a black penpoint at the end of a long white cone of exhaust. I didn't do much—just sat and watched them. When the signal rang in the elevator, I'd press the studs and we'd float down the tube to whatever floor wanted an elevator, and that'd be that.

After a few weeks, old Peer rang for me one day on the office level and told me to leave the elevator and come on in to his office. When I went in with him, there was another man there, a young man with black hair and wearing a business cut on his jacket.

"Jack," said Peer, "this is counselor Toby Gregg. Toby, this is Jack Heimelmann. Jack's been with us for over a month now."

"Is that a fact?" said Toby. "Well, I'm glad to meet you, Jack." He put out his hand, but I didn't take it.

"What's this?" I asked, looking at Peer. "What're you cooking up for me now?"

"Jack," said Peer, putting his hand on my arm and looking up into my face, "you need help. You know that. And Toby here has training that'll help him give it to you."

"I don't know about that," I said.

"Jack," said Peer. "Now, you know I wouldn't recommend any-

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thing that was bad for you. Now, I'm going to ask you to talk to Gregg. Just talk to him."

Well, I gave in. Peer said he'd get somebody else for the elevator and I was to come and talk to Gregg three times a week; and meantime, I was to be given some books to read.

The first time I went to see Gregg in his office on office level, he offered me a drink.

"A drink!" I said. And right away the old thirst came charging up. And then, while I stood there, it faded again, all by itself.

"I guess not," I said. Then I stared at him. "What's the idea of offering me a drink?" I asked. "What're you trying to do?"

"I'm just proving something to you, Jack," he said. We were sitting in a couple of slope-back easy chairs with a little low table between us that fitted up against one wall of the office. He reached over and pressed a stud on the table and a little panel in the wall above the table opened and a bottle and some glasses slid out on a tray. "Go ahead, you can have the drink if you want. I'm just showing you that it isn't your drinking that we have to fix, but what's behind it. When we get through with you, you'll be able to take a drink without going out on a bender."

"I will?" I said. I looked at the tray. "I still guess I won't have anything."

"Cigaret?" he said, offering me one.

I took that.

"Tell me, Jack," he said, when I had the cigaret going between my lips, "how long have you been smoking, now?"

"Why," I told him, "let's see. I was smoking in general prep school when I was twelve. That'd be—let's see—"

"Fourteen years," he said. "That's a long time. You started early. You must have had a pretty rough bunch of kids around that general prep."

"Bunch of damn sissies," I told him. "Catch *them* smoking! I bet there isn't a dozen of them that smoke today."

"Most people don't, you know," said Gregg.

"My dad started at ten," I said.

"That was back a few years," he smiled. "Habits change with the years, Jack. Most of those kids you were in school with were probably looking forward to jobs where smoking wouldn't be practical."

"Yeah. Yeah, I bet they were," I said. "They sure figured to be big shots."

"All of them?" he asked.

"Most of them," I said. This talk was getting on my nerves. I didn't like to talk about general prep school. I had five years of it after I got out of secondary and I was seventeen before I cut loose. And that was plenty.

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"Didn't you have a few friends?" he asked.

"Hell, yes!" I said. "D'you think I was an introvert?"

"No, Jack," he said, soothingly. "I can tell by looking at you you're not an introvert. But these friends of yours. Do you ever see any of them any more?"

I jumped up out of the chair.

"Listen, what is this?" I shouted at him. "What're you getting at? What're you trying to find out? I don't see any sense to this kind of questioning. I don't have to sit and listen to these kind of stupid questions. I'm leaving."

And I turned and headed toward the office door.

"All right, Jack," he said behind me, not irritated at all. "Come back any time you feel like it."

At the door, I turned once more to look at him. But he had his back to me. He was putting the tray with the bottles and glasses on it, back into the wall.

I told Peer I had changed my mind about the counseling and went back to work on the elevator. The old man didn't seem annoyed at all. And I worked on the elevator for several weeks, riding people up and down and going up by myself to watch the sky and the people flying around and the ships. But after a while it began to wear on me.

I don't know what actually made me decide to go back to Gregg. I suppose it was because there just wasn't anything else. There was nothing much doing with the elevator; and there wasn't much sense in leaving the place and going back to the old drinking again. I really didn't want to start that all over again; but I knew if I got out by myself I would. Finally I figured I'd go back to Gregg and tell him I'd listen to just enough questions to cure me of my drinking, but nothing else.

When I went back to see him, for the first time, though, he told me that wouldn't work.

"You see, Jack," he told me, "To get rid of the drinking, we have to get rid of whatever it is that's making you want to drink. And whatever that is, it's what causing all your other troubles. So, it's up to you whether you want a complete job done or not."

I thought for a minute. Somehow talking with him made it seem easy.

"Oh, hell!" I said, finally. "Let's dig it out. I can't be any worse off, anyway."

So we went to it. And it was one rough time. Even Gregg said it was rougher than he figured. At first I was always blowing up and stamping out. But I finally got to the point where I could tell him anything. And it came out that I'd started getting a chip on my shoulder back as a kid; because I thought the other kids were better

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than I was. Actually, Gregg said, it was my adverse environment that was hampering me. My mother was a state ward because of her unstable mental condition; and the only woman we had around the house was the housekeeper Government Service paid for. And my dad was a portable operating-room driver for a country hospital; and he was away from home on calls most of the time. He wanted me to be a driver like him when I got out of school; but by that time they had the automatic routers in, so I didn't.

But Gregg figured out that, even though I never really liked the idea, my dad wanting me to do a manual job had given me an inferiority complex. Like my driving a portable operating room, when all the other kids in school were looking forward to being Earthside deskmen, or professionals, or getting schooled for new-world trades; the sort of work that means learning half a dozen different lines that'll be needed on a new planet. Gregg figured it started hitting me as soon as I got into prep school and that was why I got into all kinds of trouble with the instructors and ran with a knify bunch and took up smoking and drinking. And he said that my inferiority complex had made me believe that I hated work; while actually, I was just taking out my dislike for my classmates on it. He said it was quite to be expected under those conditions that I would just come out of prep school; and draw my social maintenance year after year without really trying to find anything to do. And then, as time went on, the drink was bound to start to get me.

Anyway we went back over all my life and he started pointing out to me where I had been wrong in thinking I wasn't as good as the other kids; and after a while I began to see it myself. And from that time on I began actually to change.

It's not easy to explain just what it was like. I had had a basically good schooling as Gregg pointed out; and with the learning techniques used in our modern schools, the knowledge was all there, still. I had just not been using it. Now, as we talked together, he began to remind me of little odds and ends of things. My vocabulary increased and my reading speed picked up. He had me study intensively; and though at some times it was real hard, little by little I began to talk and act like someone of professional, or at least desk level.

"What you need now," Gregg said to me one day, "is to decide on some specific plan of action."

"I beg your pardon?" I said, puzzled.

"A job, or some work you can devote yourself to," said Gregg. "You've been refusing to face the

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fact for years; but in our modern society everyone is busy at their chosen work. Now, what would you like to do?"

I stared at him.

"Have you ever thought of emigrating, for instance?" he went on. "You're large and young and strong; and—active-natured. The new-world life might suit you."

I thought about it.

"The new worlds aren't like Earth," Gregg went on. "We're overstocked here on second-raters, bogged down in a surplus of inferior talent. All the bright young men and women in each generation graduate and get off planet as quickly as they can. On a newer world, you'd be freer, Jack. Your social unit would be smaller, and your personal opportunity to develop, greater. It'd mean a lot of hard work, of course."

"I wouldn't mind that," I said.

While he talked, I had been thinking. I remembered the teachers teaching about the new worlds in prep school. Hitherto untouched planets, they'd told us, which in every case present a great challenge and offer a great reward to the pioneer. Twenty-four percent of our young people emigrating every year. That meant, of course, the ones who had completed their schooling and passed the physical. The more I thought of it, the better it sounded for me.

"I'd like to leave Earth," I said. "There's nothing for me, here."

"Well, good," said Gregg. "If your mind's made up, then you've come a long way from the man I first met. You know you'll have to go back to school and get your certificate?"

"Sure. I know."

"Fine," said Gregg. He punched some buttons. "We'll start you tomorrow. Well, I guess that's enough for today."

He got up and went with me to the door and out into the main corridor of office level. Coming down the hall was Peer, and he had a little girl with brown hair with him. They stopped to talk with us and I got introduced to the girl. That was the first time I met Leena Tore.

I liked Leena a lot.

I had bumped into a lot of women in the past years; but either they had been no-goods, hitting the alcohol as hard as I was; or else they were stuck up and you couldn't get along with them. I'd see them once or twice; but we wouldn't get along and that would be the limit. They all talked too much and looked down on anybody who wasn't professional level at least.

Leena wasn't like that. She didn't talk too much; and to tell the truth, she wasn't bright at all. In fact, she was stupid. But we got along very well together. She was an orphan, raised under State su-

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pervision in a private home. They found a job for her when she got old enough; but she didn't like it and finally went on social maintenance, and didn't do anything but sit around and watch shows all day. And finally Peer heard of her and brought her down to the place.

Gregg was working with her too. But he hadn't been going on her long enough to make any real difference; and, privately, I didn't think he ever would. She was really too stupid. But she was an easy sort of person to get along with and after a while I began to think of marrying her.

Meanwhile, I was going back to school. It was hard as hell—I'd forgotten how hard it was. But then I hadn't really worked at it before; and I'd been away from the preliminary stuff a long time.

But I'd been through it all once before, as Gregg reminded me—I'd forgotten—which helped; and they really do have good techniques and associative equipment in the schools nowadays. So after a while, I began to know my stuff; and it perked me up. And when I got stuck Gregg would talk to me; and then things would come easy.

I got myself some new clothes and I began to mix with my classmates. Most of them were young kids; but by keeping my mouth shut I got along with them pretty well. And, you know—I began to feel this stuff they talk about, the sense of personal and racial destiny. I'd look around at these tall, good-looking kids talking big about the stars and the future. And then I'd look at myself in the mirror and say, "Boy, you're part of all this." And I began to see what Gregg had said my inferiority complex had cut me off from before.

They said Leena was making progress. She had been going to school too; but she was several classes behind me and she still had some time to go when I graduated. So we talked it over, all four of us, Leena and me, and Peer and Gregg; and we decided I'd go ahead and get cleared and ship out for some world. And then when Leena came along later she could just specify the same destination when she went through emigration.

Leena didn't look too pleased at having to wait. She pouted a bit, then finally gave in. But I was eager to go. These past months had gotten me thoroughly into the mood of emigration; and I was a happy man the day I went down to the big section outside the spaceport where clearing and routing went on for those who went spaceward from our city. Gregg had had a long talk with me; and I felt real good.

There wasn't to be too much to it. I presented my certificate of graduation and my credentials. The deskman glanced them over

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and asked me if I had any preference about examiners.

"Celt Winter," I said. This was a man Peer and Gregg had told me to ask for. They said he was a friend of Gregg's who had heard about me from Gregg and was very interested in me. It seems he didn't have much time off, ordinarily, so he never had any chance to drop around the place; and if I asked for him as my examiner, that would give us a chance to meet before I left.

The deskman ran his finger down his file and pressed a few studs. A message jumped out on the screen set in his desk.

"Celt Winter has just stepped out for a minute," he said. "Do you want to wait, or shall I give you someone else?"

I sort of hesitated. I hated to disappoint this Winter; but I was too wound up just to sit and twiddle my thumbs until he got back. I saw the deskman looking at me, waiting for my answer, and I got kind of nervous.

"Oh, anyone'll do," I said. "Just give me anybody that's free."

"Sven Coleman, then," said the deskman. "Desk 462." He gave me a little plastic tab and directed me through a door to his right.

I went through the door and came out into a big hall covered with desks at which examiners sat. Most of them had people sitting with them. I went ahead down a lane between the desks until I reached the four-sixty row; and two places off to my right, I came to a desk where a tall young deskman with black hair and a long, straight nose, waved me to a seat.

I handed him my credentials; my graduation certificate, my government registration card, and my physical okay sheet, for I'd taken that exam a couple of days before. He read through them.

"Well, Mr. Heimelmann," he said, smiling at me, and laying the credentials down. "You realize this is just a sort of formality. We interviewers are set up here just for the purpose of making sure that those of our people who go out to the new worlds won't want to turn back when they get there. In fact, this is just a last-minute chance for you to change your mind."

"There's nô danger of that," I said.

He smiled and nodded.

"That's fine," he said. "Now perhaps you'd like to tell me, Mr. Heimelmann, what you particularly want to do when you get to your pioneer world and any preferences you might have as to location."

Gregg had told me that they'd ask me that; and I had my answer ready.

"I'd like to get out on the edge of things," I said. "I like singleton jobs. As for location, any place that's got plenty of outdoors is fine."

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He laughed.

"Well, we can certainly suit those preferences," he said. "Most of our prospective emigrants are looking forward to team work in a close colony."

I laughed, too. I found myself liking this man.

"Probably afraid to get their feet wet," I said.

His smile went a little puzzled. Then he laughed again.

"I see what you mean," he said. "Too much community emphasis is a bad thing, even though the motives are good."

"Sure," I said. "If you like a crowd, you might as well stay here on Earth."

He looked puzzled again; and then serious. He picked up my credentials and went through them once more.

"You're in your late twenties, aren't you, Mr. Heimelmann?" he said.

"That's right," I answered.

"But I see that according to your graduation certificate, you just finished your trade learnings."

"Oh," I said. "Well, you see, I fooled around for a few years there. I couldn't seem to make up my mind about what I wanted to do."

"I see," he said. He put down my credentials and sat for a moment, tapping the top of the desk with his forefinger and looking as if he was thinking. "Excuse me a moment, Mr. Heimelmann."

He got up and left. After a few minutes he was back.

"Will you come with me, please?" he asked.

I wondered a bit; but I got up and followed him. I didn't see any of the other interviewers doing this with the people they had at their desks. But you can't tell what the procedure is in these kind of places by just looking. Sven Coleman took me over to one side of the big room and through a door into an office where a sort of nervous older-looking man got up from a desk to greet us.

"Mr. Heimelmann," said Coleman. "This is Mr. Jos Alter. He'd like to talk to you for a moment."

"Hello," I said, shaking hands.

"How do you do, Mr. Heimelmann," answered Alter. "Sit down beside my desk here, will you? That'll be all, Sven."

"Yes, sir," said Coleman and went out. I followed Alter to the desk and sat down. He had two tired lines between his eyes and a little mustache.

"Mr. Heimelmann," he said. "I've got a little test here I want you to take. I'm going to give you a tape and I'd like you to take it over to the machine there and put it in. As the questions pop up on the screen, you press either the true stud or the false to register your choice. Will you do that? I've got to step out for a minute, but I'll be right back."

And he handed me the tape. It

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all seemed sort of strange to me; but as Sven himself said, this business was just a formality. I did what Alter wanted me to.

The questions were easy at first. If I have ten credits and I give two-thirds of them away, how many do I have left? If the main traffic strips are closed to children below the age of responsibility and I have a five-year-old nephew with me, can I send him home alone? But after a while they began to get harder and I was still working when Alter came back. He took the tape and we went back to his desk, where he ran it through a scorer and set it aside. Then he just looked at me.

"Mr. Heimelmann," he said, finally. "Where've you spent the last six months or a year?"

"Why, at the place," I said. "I mean, the Freeman Independent Foundation Center."

"I see," he said. "And will you tell me briefly how you happened to go there in the first place and what you've been doing while you were there?"

I hesitated. There was something strange about all this. But I had to give him some answer and there was no point in telling him anything but the truth, when he could just press a stud on his desk and call Peer to ask him.

"Well," I said, squirming some inside, for it isn't easy to admit you've been an alcoholic, "I was drinking one day in a bar—"

And I went through the whole story for him, down to the present. After I'd finished, he sat for a long while without saying anything. I didn't say anything either. I was feeling pretty low down after admitting what I'd been. Finally he spoke.

"Blast those people!" he said, viciously. "Blast and damn them!"

I stared at him.

"Who?" I said. "Who? I don't understand."

He turned and looked me full in the face.

"Mr. Heimelmann," he said, "your friends at the Foundation —" he hesitated. "Nobody hates to tell you this more than I do; but the fact of the matter is, we can't approve you for emigration."

"Can't?" I echoed. His words seemed to roar in my ears. The room tilted and I seemed to have a sudden feeling as if I was falling, falling from a great, high place. And all the time I knew I was just sitting beside his desk. I grabbed at the desk to steady myself. I had a terrible feeling then as if everybody was marching away and leaving me—all the tall young people I'd gone to classes and graduated with. But I *had* graduated. My credentials were in order.

"Listen," I said; and I had to struggle to get the words out. "I'm qualified."

"I'm sorry," he said. And he did look sorry—sorry enough to cry.

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"You're not, Mr. Heimelmann. You're totally unfit; and your friends at the Foundation knew it. This isn't the first time they've tried to slip somebody by us, counting on the fact that modern education can get facts into anybody."

I just looked at him. I tried to say something; but my throat was too tight and the words wouldn't come out.

"Mr. Heimelmann—Jack—" he said. "I'll try and explain it to you, though it's not my job and I really don't know how. You see, in many ways, Jack, you're much better off than your ancestors. You're in perfect physical health. You're taller and stronger. You have faster reflexes and better coordination. You're much better balanced mentally, so much so, in fact, that it would be almost impossible for you to go insane, or even to develop a severe psychosis, but . . ."

I tasted blood in my mouth, but there was no pain. The room was beginning to haze up around me; and I felt something like a time bomb beginning to swell and tick is the back of my brain. His voice roared at me like out of a hurricane.

". . . you have an IQ of ninety-two, Jack. Once upon a time this wasn't too bad; but in our increasingly technical civilization —" he spread his hands helplessly.

The hurricane was getting worse. I could hardly hear him now and I could hardly see the room. I felt the time bomb trembling, ready to explode.

"What these people at the Foundation did to you," he was saying, "was to use certain psi techniques to excite your own latent psi talents—a procedure which isn't yet illegal, but shortly will be. This way, they were able to sensitize you to amounts and types of knowledge you wouldn't otherwise be able to absorb—in much the same way we train animals, using these psi techniques, to perform highly complicated actions. Like an animal,—"

The world split wide open. When I could see again, I found little, old, leather-faced Peer had joined us in the room. Alter was slumped in his chair, his eyes closed. Peer crossed over to him, looked him over, then glanced at me with a low whistle.

"Easy, Jack," he said. "Easy now —" And I suddenly realized I was trembling like a leaf. But with his words, the tension began to go. Peer was shaking his head at me.

"We got a shield on Alter just in time," he said. "He's just going to wake up thinking you left and he dozed off for a while. But you don't realize what kind of a mental punch you've got, Jack. You would have killed him if I hadn't protected him."

For the first time, that came home to me. My knees weakened.

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"No, it's all right. He's just out temporarily," said Peer. "Unfreeze yourself, Jack; and we'll teleport out of here. . . . What's the matter?"

"I want to know—" the words came hard from my throat. "I want to know, right now. What'd you do to me?"

Peer sighed.

"Can't it wait—no, I guess not," he said, looking at me. "If you must know, you were an experiment. The first of your particular kind. But there'll be lots like you from now on; we'll see to that. Earth is starving, Jack; starving for the very minds and talents and skills it ships out each year. It's behind the times now and falling further every year, because the first-class all emigrate and the culls are left behind."

"Thanks!" I said, between my teeth and with my fists clenched. "Thanks a lot."

"Why not face facts?" said Peer cheerfully. "You're a high-grade moron, Jack—no, don't try that on me, what you did on Alter," he added, as I took a step forward. "You're not that tough, yet, Jack; though someday we hope you may be. As I was saying, you're a high-grade moron. Me, I've got an aneurism that can't stand any kind of excitement, let alone space-flight. Gregg, for your information, has a strong manic-depressive pattern—and so on, at the Foundation."

"I don't know what you mean," I said, sullenly.

"Of course you don't. But you will, Jack, you will," said Peer. "A government of second-raters were afraid to trigger your kind of talent in a high-grade moron, so they passed restrictive laws. We've just proved that triggering your abilities can not only be safe but practical. More evidence for a change that's coming here on Earth."

"You lied to me!" I shouted, suddenly. "All the time you were lying to me! All of you!"

"Well, now, we had to," Peer said. "It required a block-buster of an emotional shock to break through all the years of conditioning that told you someone like yourself couldn't compete. You had to be so frustrated on a normal level, you'd go to your abnormal powers in desperation. Your desire to get off Earth to a place where life would be different was real enough. Gregg just built it up to where you couldn't face being turned down. And then we arranged the turn-down."

I was crying.

"You shouldn't have done it!" I said. "You shouldn't have! For the first time, I thought I had some friends. For the first time—"

"Who says we're not your friends?" snapped Peer. "You think we went to all that trouble to break the law and bust you loose without figuring that you

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could be as close to us as anyone in the world could be? You—well, there's no use trying to explain it to you. You got to be shown. Lock on, gang!"

And suddenly—they did lock on. For a second, I almost fell over, I was so scared. I felt Peer's mind slip into mine, then Toby Greggs'—and, without warning, there too was Leena. And she was not the same Leena I knew at all, but somebody almost as bright as Toby. Only, she was an epileptic.

All of a sudden, I knew too much. I heaved, with all the strength that was in me, trying to break loose. But the three of them held me easily.

"You just want to use me!" I shouted at them—with my mouth and my mind, both. "You just want me for what I can do for you—like a big, stupid horse." I was crying again, this time internally as well. "Just because you're all smarter than I am and you can make me do what you say!"

"Calm down, Jack," came the thought of Toby. "You've got the picture all wrong. What kind of a team is that, the three of us riding on your back? What do you think keeps Peer nicely calmed down all the time? And what do you think keeps Leena's attacks under control and me sane? Let me show you something."

And then he did something which was for me like heaven opening up and showing a rainbow in all its glory to a blind man.

"You want a few extra I.Q. points to think with?" said Toby. "Take mine!"

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William Eastlake has published a number of fine stories in various "quality" and "little" magazines. The following, reprinted from The Kenyon Review, concerns a Zia Indian, who said: "I know I speak too much of Beethoven but Beethoven, my friends, is a universe." It also concerns the Zia's Navajo girl friend, who represented a different sort of universe. . . .

WHAT NICE HANDS HELD

by William Eastlake

THE ZIA INDIAN WAS GREAT on advice. He said of our Legion Club that it was a retreat. He said we wanted to live in the past, and that no one can live in the past, even an Indian. Especially an Indian. "We are not so much building our own Legion as we are compounding an already impossible cultural dichotomy."

"It's a place to play poker," Chee Bill Toledo said.

"No," the Zia still held. "We build our own Legion Club out here because we choose to ignore a de facto situation vis a vis the Whites and we don't want to face being Indians."

"Maybe you don't want to be an Indian," Chee Bill Toledo said. "I don't mind."

"I'm no damn Indian," Cass Goodner said.

"I mean we are all Indians out here," the Zia said. "In the way I mean."

Philosophy. We have a great deal of time for philosophy out here. Or let's say we talk a lot. It's a long time between branding and the fences are good and so, even before the Legion, we had time for talk and plans.

Once Chee Bill Toledo had a plan to hold up the bank on horseback, hide in the hills where the old whisky still still was on the Largo Country, impossible to reach.

"It's a retreat," the Zia said. "Like our Legion. Everything you guys think of is a retreat. Holding up banks is conforming to a regressive pattern if I ever heard one."

"And you can get shot too," Chee Bill Toledo said.

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The Zia, Tom Tobeck, had been to school, Utah Agricultural. He still had the Utah Aggie sign on his T shirt and he usually wore a half tolerant and half unbelieving, small smile and a large cigar and talked a great deal about everything but agriculture which bored him.

It was Chee Bill Toledo's idea to start the Legion Club but it was Tom Tobeck's idea to keep all the Indians out.

"You are an Indian yourself," Cass said.

"Yes, but Indians tend to be dull."

"Would you join this?"

"Out here it's all there is to join," Tom Tobeck said.

So we started the Legion Club between Johnson's and the Torreon trading posts. We were refused a charter from an outfit that calls itself The American Legion because some of our members had not been in the Army. To have eliminated the members who had not been in the Army would have been sad and to change the name of the club, as Tom Tobeck said, would be only to substitute some outlandish Indian name.

"And letting other people run our lives," Chee Bill Toledo said.

The Legion was built on the property of a man named Three Ears of an Elk, a Navajo, a Navajo who did not believe in Progress but didn't know what was happening. The Zia believed in Progress. Our mud hut was a start—adobe mixed with straw. Tom Tobeck directed the operation because Zias built of mud—Navajos, no. Navajos built of chinked cedar posts, igloo-shaped. The Legion was an innovation, a cube in a round country. You felt a long way from home.

An institution like the Legion gives men leisure which, as the Zia said, is the beginning of all civilizations. One of the first civilized ideas was to raid the surrounding country using the Legion as a base of operations, but this idea never got off the ground. Although I distrust people with accurate memories I think the second idea was to drink a lot. This must have fallen through because of lack of money. Afraid Of His Own Horses wanted us to grow surplus crops and collect from the government. I don't know what happened to this idea but we did acquire a breeding herd of sheep which, I suppose again, is a basis for civilization but, as Chee Bill Toledo said recently, "Remember, we et them all up." There were other more practical ideas that fell of their own practicality, and gradually there was a vacuum into which the Zia, Tom Tobeck, stepped. Fell.

Our Zia, Tom Tobeck, met the Navajo girl, Nice Hands, at a sing at Star Lake which is between Tinian and White Horse, and he brought her back to the clubhouse

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and she never left. It was like Tom Tobeck to break the Indian rules and marry a Navajo but we were surprised all the same. Surprised he'd take up with a primitive, uncivilized girl who knew nothing of exploding populations, even if she was pretty. All the women Tom Tobeck had talked about since he got back from college had been white dudes, aspen painters, the kind of white women who are attracted to another culture, to Indians, especially if the Indian is handsome and talks of exploding populations and dwindling natural resources. It never occurred to any of us that Nice Hands might be what the Zia would call a surrogate or what Chee Bill Toledo, after Hollywood, would call a stand-in until some dude white woman got rid of her husband or whatever waiting dudes do.

The Zia's point was difficult. At the beginning I suspect he had none. That is, I think his meeting with the Navajo girl, Nice Hands, was accidental. I believe his phrase, "The partnership in brotherhood of all Indians," was coined after the fact. But it had always been a fact that a Navajo can't marry a Zia. Can't, as a matter of fact, have anything to do with one. Of course at a Navajo yebechai, what we call a sweetie sweetie, you may see a Zia or a Santa Ana or even a Jemez sitting there, coy, but that's about it, that's about all. I don't know about the rest of the reservation but it's true in the Checkerboard. An Apache is different. I've seen Apaches dance at sweetie sweeties and more, but then the Apaches and the Navajos were once the same tribe, speak almost the same language. A Zia is a Pueblo Indian, like a Santa Ana and a Jemez and a Taos and you can't get much lower, you can't get much closer to a white man than that, the Navajo holds.

At first we thought of Nice Hands as an intrusion, then she began to think of us as an intrusion, then things began to level out and we took each other for granted until we began to notice her more —her sand painting, her excellent coffee, her eyes, her nice hands. She would sit there maybe making a rug for Tom Tobeck in back of the loom, her sharp and sculptured face etched in back of the woof and warp as though the face were a pattern her shuttle would soon weave.

We got in the habit of getting out and leaving Nice Hands and the Zia alone. Navajos all grow up in one small hogan room. They are accustomed to their parents' love making as children. Love to a Navajo is not a long series of forbidden revelations, shocks, as it is to Whites. It is a natural, pleasant, and beautiful thing to them. Nevertheless, the rest of us were in the habit of leaving and sitting outside at their Legion home.

"God is a unicorn. The only

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problem is exploding populations and dwindling resources. I know I speak too much of Beethoven but Beethoven, my friends, is a universe." I don't know whether the Zia got this kind of talk at Utah Aggie but don't forget he had been to Salt Lake and Denver too. Then Tom Tobeck was off on something else before you got what he had just said. The dwindling resources thing was kind of a half answer to Cass's statement that the Zia was in real trouble with the Navajos by taking up with Nice Hands.

"No. Exploding populations and dwindling resources. That's the trouble, remember. And neglected geniuses. Remember that."

The Navajos knew that the Zia had been to college and in their heads it excused a lot. The Navajos are a gentle race, and tolerant, but they can become suddenly vicious. In the depths of the reservation, law and order is on their own terms and even here in the Checkerboard, death can be violent.

"The way I see this," Cass said a couple of weeks after Nice Hands took over. We were sitting in the Clubhouse, the one high window gave a fairy light. Nice Hands was working at the loom. The floor was never finished and a foxy dust always rose and settled gently on all of us and on the pieces of furniture: a loom, a bar, seven empty tomato juice crates, a wine press and a diamond necklace. The wine press never worked and was shattered. I don't know where it came from. The diamond necklace was glass and was a present from the Zia to Nice Hands and it hung on the wall for all to see.

"Yes, the way I see it," Cass said, "the Navajos will burn our clubhouse down or worse. After all, Nice Hands' father is a leader."

Being a leader in the Checkerboard gave the Navajo absolutely no authority but enormous prestige. A leader had a great deal of face to save.

"What do you think?" Cass was directing his question at Nice Hands. "What do you think the old man will do?"

Nice Hands did not speak English too well and did not seem to understand it too well unless the Zia, Tom Tobeck, was speaking. Now she just seemed to concentrate on the loom more and the shuttle went a little faster and there was that kind of primitive, embarrassed, half-smile on her face that a Navajo will frequently give a White, as though the white man always spoke in obscenities.

"Nothing," the Zia, Tom Tobeck, said. "It's a civilized country. Nothing. He can do nothing."

"If he does something, what do we do?" Cass asked.

Chee Bill Toledo was sitting casually on a tomato crate and he said, "We send her home."

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Actually the Zia and Nice Hands were using the club as a home so Chee Bill Toledo's point was lost even on me. Marriage? Marriage rites the Indians find embarrassing, funny, and, I guess, needlessly expensive. The only thing they understand is that it's a matriarchy so the women own everything. She puts his saddle outside when she's finished with the man, and the mother-in-law, as with the distant Esquimos, is never permitted to show her face or be seen.

Outside of that Utah Aggie shirt and the omnipresent cigar, I don't think the Zia owned anything. Yes, he had a Tex Tan saddle that was always with him. He took it even to Utah Aggie. He used anybody's horse and, with the mounted Zia and his cigar on top, the horse became the horse that smokes. The saddle, I think, was the Zia's touchstone for reality—what he was. After all, although genius is neglected and art may be a universe and populations explode all over the place as natural resources melt before our eyes —can you ride them, use them as a pillow? Can you say, There rides the smoking Zia on his art? Dwindling natural resources? No, a man to be a man must have a saddle on which to sit.

The Zia sat on it now and ignored Chee Bill Toledo. He withdrew the cigar politely and spoke to Nice Hands.

"What are all these guys doing in our house?"

Well, then, let him fight his own battles. However, on second thought, it was our clubhouse, and then too it was our war. Most of the cowboys and Indians (for that is what we all were) had not been in either of the Great Wars so our Legion was not going to back away from this one. I had been in the last one but I was curious. Chee Bill Toledo, I guess, had had the most interesting war experience. He had been bumming around California when the war broke, he tried to enlist but was rejected as not being right in the head—not integrable they called it. He tried to get a job in a Western movie as an Indian but was rejected as not looking the part. They finally gave him a part as the typical soldier, at a place called Republic Pictures in Studio City. It was a war picture. I guess, at the Legion, we had heard every detail of his war experiences a million times.

"We're not pulling back," Chee Bill Toledo said. He always talked in military jargon.

I watched Nice Hands. She had a great deal of poise, native dignity, the kind of poise that comes from doing anything you're about exceptionally well. She had an Asian tilt to her eyes. There has not been much new blood in the Navajos since their Asiatic days. A Zia cross would not change the children much but I guess the

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Navajos have their strange reasons for wanting to stay pure. Nice Hands stopped the shuttle and looked back at the Zia.

"Her father can do nothing," Tom Tobeck repeated. "Nothing."

It would have been dramatic if the shots had been fired then, exactly then, like in a movie at the mission. But it was about five minutes later when there was the bang, bang, bang, until seven shots, exactly what a lever action Winchester will hold, were emptied off at the Clubhouse.

Everyone froze until all the shots were over and then went quietly and innocently outside in time to see a distant and unrecognizable figure get into a blue pickup and slowly drive off. If the person had swung up on a horse and galloped off it would have been better, much better. Now the killer's timing was off by five minutes and he, she or it didn't use a horse, but the bullets were real. The Zia dug one out of the adobe and tossed it on the ground.

"A thirty-thirty."

Everybody began to wonder now what Nice Hands held. What she believed. What she would do about this. Love is an enormous word like Beauty and Truth, Duty, Patriotism and Honor. In the wrong mouth they can mean absolutely nothing. Sacrifice too has become overworked and meaningless. Sacrifice for Love is quite a pair and we didn't expect the Zia to use them but he did. Outside the Legion he got them in somehow. But we still didn't know what Nice Hands held.

Inside again the Zia glanced at the work on the loom and said, "Art is a universe," and lit a cigar. I swear that outside he said something about sacrifice for love, but then all of us at the Legion were being shot at too.

"I wish to die with you," Nice Hands said.

How would the Zia take this? Could he rise to the occasion of death? How great a word was his Love? We knew he would "Sacrifice for Love," but was it a love that passeth all understanding of a thirty-thirty caliber Winchester? The Zia tapped his cigar on the saddle, looked at the wine press as though seeing it for the first time and then looked back to Nice Hands.

"We are a speck in the universe and all temporal relationships are ephemeral."

I don't know why none of us at the time were able to translate this into: "The Zia is looking out for number one—himself." And that when he said, "Sacrifice for Love," he was talking about someone else's sacrifice. It just shows how we wrongly take the meaning of a platitude for granted. But then, none of us had been to Utah Aggie.

The Zia got up then, slung the saddle over his shoulder below the

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cigar and above the T shirt sign.

"You stay here, I'll get that bastard's scalp," he said and went out the door. In a few seconds he was back, kissed Nice Hands on the forehead, examined her work and then disappeared.

Disappeared where? Nice Hands, after a few quiet minutes at the loom, got up and tied a leather lariat string from one wall of the hogan to the other, about six feet up. The Navajos believe that as long as the leather rope remains tight above, their loved ones are safe. Cass suspected that the rope would remain tight if the weather remained dry. We kept our mouths shut on all those things. I was suspect enough already by writing, despite the fact that I ran cattle. Cass had traded enough horses to keep his mouth shut. Nice Hands went back to her loom. The rope remained tight.

After a short while we went outside and left Nice Hands alone with her rope to watch. We smoked a cigarette and looked around but we couldn't see the Zia anyplace. He must have lugged his saddle somewhere in search of a horse to look for the assassin. But the Zia wasn't around.

"Let's track him," the son of Three Ears of an Elk said.

You don't have to be an Indian to track a man. Anyone who has run cattle on a big place can. It's the only way you have of locating them. A man carrying the weight of a saddle is easy to track even if he tries to fool you.

Even if he tries to fool you. This did not really sink in to any of us until we saw that the Zia had used four or five deceptions to throw us off his trail. First he took out over a ridge of hard Lewis shale and it took us a while to find where he came off, then he walked all the way through the Ojo del Espiritu Santo Grant, keeping to the middle of the shallow Rio San Jose. He crossed the Puerco below the Grant where he mingled with some fresh horse tracks but he didn't catch a horse and four of those six horses were catchable. Now the Zia topped out over the Portales Mesa. He must have been moving fast because when we topped out we could not pick him out on the Valle Plata Valley floor below. But we knew now from his direction that he was headed for the main highway, the blacktop, so we stepped up the pace. Now all of us were suspicious and curious. It was not Nice Hands' father who had fired those shots. He would have gone towards the reservation. It looked as though Tom Tobeck was going to join whoever had shot at us and it looked as though he knew who it was. What friend of his had fired those shots at the Legion and why? Had it been at once a signal and an excuse for the Zia to fly?

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When you get to the top of the red Chinle formation that is the true southern end of the Rockies, Route 422 flows beneath you, a narrow black river making its way through Indian country down into Texas and other improbable places until it empties somewhere into the Gulf of Mexico. Up here you have an endless airship view of the white man's dirty trail to the sea, and right below us on the asphalt was the blue pickup waiting for the Zia.

"Wait a minute," Cass said. "It's a woman."

I don't know why we had all expected, taking it for granted, that it was a man that fired those shots from that pickup.

"A woman. An Anglo woman," Chee Bill Toledo said.

How were we going to explain this to Nice Hands? I think that's what went through all of our minds. How would we let her down with a gentle lie?

The dark river of road, Route 422, is visible from the Portales Mesa all the way almost to the Sandia Peaks. We watched the Anglo woman greet the Zia with a kiss, then the Zia started to throw the saddle in the back of the pickup, seemed to change his mind and tossed it in a near deep arroyo instead. His saddle, his symbol, his last link with the Indians. Then they got into the pickup and drove off rapidly and desperately, burning rubber as criminals, adolescents, police and lovers will.

I said that from here you could see the Sandia Peaks. You could certainly see with ease all the way down to the San Ysidro Motel where the blue pickup stopped and the Anglo woman and the Zia got out and went in and must have closed the door and here it was only high noon.

"They couldn't wait," Cass said. "Couldn't wait to get to New York City, Socorro or wherever out of Indian Country. They couldn't even wait till it got dark, didn't even eat or have a drink."

"Or marry up."

And then too there was Nice Hands. Nice Hands waiting and watching, watching that rope. Watching that rope in the manner and custom of the ancients who believed that as long as the leather thong remained taut, did not go suddenly slack, their loved one was safe. Safe from everything, and this certainly meant—and with apocryphal proof—wolves and bear and, if the rite went back far enough into their dark past, the saber toothed tiger and other strange beasts, including man. But was the reckoning of the rope ever with women? Anglo women?

We found out. Not that it was. No man could ever claim that. The rope, the leather rope found around the neck of the Zia, still taut above the T shirt, might suddenly have gone slack in the hogan minutes, maybe only seconds,

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after the motel door slammed. The door closed and in the first fumbling seconds of their lover lust, those first anguished, taut seconds, the rope went slack in the hogan. No one claimed that, mentioned it. A rope slack, a lover lost.

However, it was that same leather hogan rope around the Zia's throat. And how did Nice Hands know or get there within those few hours? She got there maybe by tracking the same way we got there. But the police called it suicide as police will when they figure any other verdict is more trouble than it is worth. When you don't have a jail. The WPA adobe jail dissolved in '45. Then, he was an Indian anyway. Finally then, in death, an Indian, despite the T shirt, neglect of genius, exploding populations, dwindling natural resources and the universe of art. An Indian.

The Legion finally dissolved. Remember it too was built of adobe. We all went our separate ways. A strange note—Chee Bill Toledo married Nice Hands and they live now deep in the reservation. The Legion will never know whether ancient symbols work, whether the rope went slack and Nice Hands knew, or whether Chee Bill Toledo ran back to the hogan and then Nice Hands knew. But one thing we are very certain of. We were always puzzled at the Legion and in awe and wonderment at what lay behind the inscrutable Navajo face of Nice Hands. What design? What omen? What harbinger to what prologue coming on? What did she think in back of this? Believe? What did Nice Hands hold? We know now. Nice Hands finally held a rope.

They buried the Zia at the adobe Legion and Chee Bill Toledo said something good at the bier about neglected genius, the universe of art, exploding populations and dwindling natural resources but he couldn't resist working in his own war experiences which had nothing to do with the dead Zia, and once during the services he did look hard at the wavering Nice Hands and say, "We can't pull back now," which, although military jargon, did seem to buck her up. Then she picked up something from her lap and Chee Bill Toledo went suddenly quiet as he watched the rope that Nice Hands held.

Along with our adobe Legion and the jail, the Zia's tombstone has since dissolved. Everything was made of mud.

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The first Martian science fiction story—as far as we know—to find its way to the blue sands of Earth . . . .

HOPSOIL

by Robert F. Young

(TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: *The following story came into my possession through certain hitherto inaccessible channels, the nature of which I am not at liberty to divulge. It is, to the best of my knowledge, the first Martian science fiction story ever to reach Earth, and, while it makes its own point, there are a number of other points that can be inferred from its pages:* (1) *Martians are pretty much like us;* (2) *their civilization is pretty much like our own;* (3) *all the while Earth science-fiction writers have been using Mars to mirror the foibles of our society, Martian science-fiction writers have been using Earth to mirror the foibles of Martian society;* (4) *the mirror business has been overdone on Mars as well as on Earth, and certain Martian science-fiction writers have started parodying other Martian science-fiction writers; and* (5) *the story itself falls into this latter category.*)

The ship came down out of the abysmal immensities and settled like a dark and wingless bird on the blue sands of Earth.

Captain Frimpf opened the door. He stepped out into the sparkling sunshine and filled his lungs with the clean sweet air. All around him the blue sands stretched away to the hazy horizon. In the distance the broken buildings of a long-dead city iridesced like upthrust shards of colored glass. High above him fat little clouds played tag on the big blue playground of the sky.

His eyes misted. Earth, he thought. Earth at last!

The three enlisted men, who made up the rest of the historic crew, came out of the ship and stood beside him. They, too, stared at the land with misted eyes.

"Blue," breathed Birp.

"Blue," murmured Fardel.

"Blue!" gasped Pempf.

"Well of course, blue," said the captain gently. "Haven't our as-

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tronomers maintained all along that the blueness of Earth could not be wholly attributable to the light-absorbent properties of its amosphere? The soil *had* to be blue!"

He knelt down and scooped up a handful of the wondrous substance. It trickled through his fingers like blue mist. "The blue sands of Earth," he whispered reverently.

He straightened up and took off his hat and stood in the sparkling sunlight and let the clean Earth wind blow through his hair. In the distance the city tinkled like glass chimes, and the wind wafted the sound across the blue sands to his ears, and he thought of warm Martian summers and long lazy days, and hot afternoons, drinking lemonade on Grandmother Frimpf's front porch.

Presently he became aware that someone was breathing down the back of his neck. He turned irritably. "What is it, Birp?"

Birp cleared his throat. "Beg pardon, sir," he said, "but don't you think the occasion calls for—I mean to say, sir, that it's been a long voyage, and Pempf and Fardel and myself, we're a little thir—I mean, we're a little tense, and we thought—"

He quailed before the scorn in the captain's eyes. "Very well," the captain said coldly. "Open up a case of the rotgut. But only one, understand? And if I find a single empty bottle defiling this virgin landscape I'll clap every one of you in the brig!"

Birp had started off at a gallop toward the ship. He paused at the captain's admonition. "But what'll we do with them, sir? If we put them back in the ship, it'll take just that much more fuel to blast off, and we're already short of fuel as it is."

The captain pondered for a moment. It was not a particularly abstruse problem, and he solved it with a minimum of difficulty. "Bury them," he said.

While the crew chug-a-lugged their beer the captain stood a little to one side, staring at the distant city. He pictured himself telling his wife about it when he got back to Mars, and he saw himself sitting at the dinner table, describing the pastel towers and the shining spires and the sad and shattered buildings.

In spite of himself, he saw his wife, too. She was sitting across the table from him, listening and eating. Mostly eating. Why, she was even fatter now than she'd been when he left. For the thousandth time he found himself wondering why wives had to get so fat—so fat sometimes that their husbands had to wheel them around in wife-barrows. Why couldn't they get up and move around once in a while instead of going in whole-hog for every labor-saving

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device the hucksters put on the market? Why did they have to eat, eat, eat, all the time?

The captain's face paled at the thought of the grocery bill he would have to pay upon his return, and presently the grocery bill directed his mind to other equally distressing items, such as the national sales tax, the road tax, the tree tax, the gas tax, the grass tax, the air tax, the first world-war tax, the second world-war tax, the third world-war tax and the fourth world-war tax.

He sighed. It was enough to drive a man to drink, paying for wars your father, your grandfather, your great-grandfather and your great-great-grandfather had fought in! He looked enviously at Birp and Pempf and Fardel. *They* weren't worried about *their* taxes. *They* weren't worried about anything. They were dancing around the empty beer case like a trio of barbarians, and already they had made up a dirty song about the blue sands of Earth.

Captain Frimpf listened to the words. His ears grew warm, then hot. "All right, men, that's enough!" he said abruptly. "Bury your bottles, burn the case and turn in. We've got a hard day ahead of us tomorrow."

Obediently, Birp and Pempf and Fardel dug four rows of little holes in the blue soil and covered up their dead soldiers one by one. Then, after burning the case and saying good night to the captain, they went back into the ship.

The captain lingered outside. The moon was rising, and such a moon! Its magic radiance turned the plain into a vast midnight-blue tablecloth and transformed the city into a silvery candelabra. He was captivated all over again.

The mystery of those distant empty buildings and silent forsaken streets crept across the plain and touched his marrow. What had happened to the inhabitants? he wondered. What had happened to the inhabitants of the other broken cities he had seen while the ship was orbiting in?

He shook his head. He did not know, and probably he never would. His ignorance saddened him, and suddenly he could no longer endure the poignancy of the plain and the uninterrupted silence of the night, and he crept into the ship and closed the door behind him. For a long time he lay in the darkness of his stateroom, thinking of the people of Earth; of the noble civilization that had come and gone its way and had left nothing behind it but a handful of crystal memories. Finally he slept.

When he went outside the next morning there were twenty-four beer trees growing in front of the ship.

The classification had leaped automatically into Captain Frimpf's

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mind. He had never seen beer trees before, in fact he had never even heard of them; but what better name could you give to a group of large woody plants with bottles of amber fluid hanging from their branches like fruit ready to be plucked?

Some of the fruit had already been plucked, and there was a party in progress in the young orchard. Moreover, judging from the row of little hummocks along the orchard's edge, more seed had been planted.

The captain was dumbfounded. How could any kind of soil—even Earth soil—grow beer trees overnight from empty bottles? He began to have a glimmering of what might have happened to the people of Earth.

Pempf came up to him, a bottle in each hand. "Here, try some, sir," he said enthusiastically. "You never tasted anything like it!"

The captain put him in his place with a scathing glance. "I'm an officer, Pempf. Officers don't drink *beer!*"

"Oh. I—I forgot, sir. Sorry."

"You should be sorry. You and those other two! Who gave you permission to eat—I mean to drink—Earth fruit?"

Pempf hung his head just enough to show that he was repentant, but not any more repentant than his inferior status demanded. "No one, sir. I—I guess we kind of got carried away."

"Aren't you even curious about how these trees happened to come up? You're the expedition's chemist—why aren't you testing the soil?"

"There wouldn't be any point in testing it, sir. A topsoil with properties in it capable of growing trees like this out of empty beer bottles is the product of a science a million years ahead of our own. Besides, sir, I don't think it's the soil alone that's responsible. I think that the sunlight striking on the surface of the moon combines with certain lunar radiations and gives the resultant moonlight the ability to replenish and to multiply anything planted on the planet."

The captain looked at him. "*Anything*, you say?"

"Why not sir? We planted empty beer bottles, and got beer trees, didn't we?"

"H'm'm," the captain said.

He turned abruptly and re-entered the ship. He spent the day in his stateroom, lost in thought, the busy schedule he had mapped out for the day completely forgotten. After the sun had set, he went outside and buried all the credit notes he had brought with him in back of the ship. He regretted that he hadn't had more to bring, but it didn't make any difference really, because as soon as the credit trees bloomed he would have all the seed he needed.

That night, for the first time in years, he slept without dreaming

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about his grocery bill and his taxes.

But the next morning when he hurried outside and ran around the ship he found no credit trees blooming in the sunlight. He found nothing but the little hummocks he himself had made the night before.

At first his disappointment stunned him. And then he thought, *Perhaps with money it takes longer. Money is probably as hard to grow as it is to get.* He walked back around the ship and looked at the orchard. It was three times its former size and fronted the ship like a young forest. Wonderingly he walked through the sun-dappled aisles, staring enviously at the clusters of amber fruit.

A trail of beer-bottle caps led him to a little glade where a new party was in progress. Perhaps whingding would have been a better word. Pempf and Fardel and Birp were dancing around in a circle like three bearded woodland nymphs, waving bottles and singing at the top of their voices. The dirty song about the blue sands of Earth now had a second verse.

They came to a startled stop when they saw him; then, after regarding him blearily for a moment, they resumed festivities again. Abruptly Captain Frimpf wondered if they had gone to bed at all last night. He was inclined to doubt it, but whether they had or hadn't, it was painfully clear that discipline was deteriorating rapidly. If he wanted to save the expedition he would have to act quickly.

But for some reason his initiative seemed to have deserted him. The thought of saving the expedition made him think of going back to Mars, and the thought of going back to Mars made him think of his fat wife, and the thought of his fat wife made him think of the grocery bill, and the thought of the grocery bill made him think of his taxes, and for some unfathomable reason the thought of his taxes made him think of the liquor cabinet in his stateroom and of the unopened bottle of bourbon that stood all alone on its single shelf.

He decided to put off reprimanding the crew till tomorrow. Surely, by then, his credit trees would have broken through the soil, thereby giving him some idea of how long he would have to wait before he could harvest his first crop and plant his second. Once his fortune was assured he would be able to cope more competently with the beer-tree problem.

But in the morning the little hummocks behind the ship were still barren. The beer orchard, on the other hand, was a phenomenon to behold. It stretched halfway across the plain in the direction of the dead city, and the sound of the wind in its fruit-laden branches brought to mind a bottling works at capacity production.

There was little doubt in Captain Frimpf's mind now as to the

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fate that had overtaken the people of Earth. But what, he asked himself, had happened to the trees *they* had planted? He was not an obtuse man, and the answer came presently: The people of Earth had performed a function similar to that performed by the bees on Mars. In drinking the fluid fruit they had in effect pollinated the crystal seed-shells that enclosed it, and it was the pollinating as well as the planting of the shells that had caused new trees to grow.

It must have been a pleasant ecology while it lasted, the captain reflected. But like all good things it had been run into the ground. One by one the people had become heavy pollinators, and finally they had pollinated themselves to death, and the trees, unable any longer to reproduce themselves, had become extinct.

A tragic fate, certainly. But was it any more tragic than being taxed to death?

The captain spent the day in his stateroom trying to figure out a way to pollinate money, his eyes straying, with increasing frequency, to the little paneled door of his liquor cabinet. Towards sunset Birp and Fardel and Pempf appeared and asked for an audience with him.

Fardel was spokesman. "Shir," he said, "we've made up our minds. We aren't going to go back to Marsh."

The captain wasn't surprised, but for some reason he was annoyed. "Oh go on back to your damned orchard and stop bothering me!" he said, turning away from them.

After they left he went over to his liquor cabinet and opened the paneled door. He picked up the forlorn bottle sitting on the shelf. Its two empty companions had long ago gone down the disposal tube and were somewhere in orbit between Earth and Mars.

"Good thing I saved one," the captain said. He opened it up and pollinated it; then he staggered outside and buried it behind the ship and sat down to watch it grow.

Maybe his credit trees would come up and maybe they wouldn't. If they didn't he was damned if he was going back to Mars, either. He was sick of his fat wife and he was sick of the grocery bill and he was sick of the national sales tax, the road tax, the tree tax, the gas tax, the grass tax, the air tax, the first world-war tax, the second world-war tax, the third world-war tax and the fourth world-war tax. Most of all he was sick of being a self-righteous martinet with a parched tongue.

Presently the moon came up and he watched delightedly while the first shoot of his whiskey tree broke the surface of the blue sands of Earth.

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SCIENCE

The mystery of the creation of matter, and its extinction . . . with side speculations on the shoe sizes of dinosaurs, and a most improbable way for the Good Doctor to lose a little weight . . .

HERE IT COMES; THERE IT GOES!

by Isaac Asimov

THERE'S A RUMOR ABROAD THAT I never read any books but my own. How this got started I don't know, unless it is because someone has noticed that when my new copy of F&SF arrives, I turn first to the science article.

In any case, it isn't so. I very frequently (well, occasionally) read other people's books. For instance, I have just read a book called *Towards a Unified Cosmology* (Basic Books, 1960) by Reginald O. Kapp, which I enjoyed every bit as much as one of my own.

It presents a view of the universe, its beginning and its end, so startling, so clearly expressed and so all-but-convincing that I can't resist devoting this month's article to a discussion of it (and let's hope I get it straight, too).

If, when you finish this article —and here I must warn you that some of what I say will be mine and not Kapp's and I may not always make it perfectly clear which is which—you find yourself interested, I strongly recommend that you read the book itself. Go ahead. It will do you good. It's less than 300 pages long, and contains very little mathematics.

Kapp considers first the ques-

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tion of the origin of the universe and points out that in general three varieties of outlook are possible.

First, there may have been no origin at all. The matter-energy of the universe may have existed through eternity. This supposition eliminates the nastiness of worrying about creation, perhaps, but it introduces other problems.

For instance, why is the universe in its present active state? Stars are being formed and are converting hydrogen to helium and are eventually being converted to white dwarfs (sometimes going through a nova or supernova stage in the process). If this has been going on through all eternity, why is not all the hydrogen long since converted, all the stars long since exploded or burned out, all the white dwarfs themselves reduced to black cinders? In short, why is not the universe in a state of maximum entropy?

One way out of the dilemma, which Kapp doesn't mention, but which I once saw suggested is this: The state of maximum entropy is a state of complete randomness. Eventually, by chance movements of the particles in such a universe, a state of partial order is restored; as when by shuffling cards long enough, you manage to get, through pure chance, ten spades in a row. The present active universe may represent such a situation of partially restored order and it is now working its way down back to maximum entropy. What that is reached, a period of timeless disorder ensues until another universe, perhaps more highly organized than the present one and perhaps less highly organized, is created by chance, and so on.

Another simpler way out of the dilemma is to suppose that the universe is infinite in extent. It would naturally take an infinite length of time to reduce an infinite universe to maximum entropy. But this piles infinity on infinity and introduces other problems.

The second general hypothesis of origin is that the matter-energy of the universe *was* created all at once at some particular time in the past. This type of theory of origin became popular in the 1920's when the galaxies were found to be hurrying apart at a rate that increased smoothly with their distance.

If we trace matters back into the past, like running a film backward, all the galaxies would suck inward, approach each other, coalesce into one huge gob of matter, the "cosmic egg." It was that egg which is conceived as exploding in the biggest bang in history to start the Universe. (I had some words to say about this in my article "The Big Bang" in the May, 1958, issue of the late lamented Venture Science Fiction.)

Here there are several sub-possibilities. Either the cosmic egg

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was created out of nothing and exploded at once, or it exploded after an interval of stability. Or else the cosmic egg always existed but happened to explode at one specific time. In any case, special times existed when a creation took place, or an explosion or both. What would be so special about that time as to bring about so special an event? To answer that, one must introduce additional hypotheses. (One such hypothesis, which has been around a long time, is the well-known theological explanation of the Creation.)

Still another sub-possibility is that the universe first contracts to form a cosmic egg, then expands to some limit, then contracts again and so on. In such an "oscillating universe," the time of the big bang is merely one extreme of the oscillation and is unusual just because it is an extreme. However, this is also a sub-possibility of the eternal universe theory and involves the problems already mentioned in that connection.

Thus, both varieties of theory as to the beginnings of the universe involve an original assumption that must then be shored up by additional assumptions, such as an occasionally backward-running entropy, or a periodically contracting universe, or a universe of infinite size.

Now, Kapp feels the necessity of additional hypotheses weakens the original one. He favors a strict application of "Occam's Razor," which is a point of view to the effect that, all things being equal, those explanations of phenomena should be accepted which involve the fewest assumptions. Superfluous assumptions should be shaved away, hence the "razor" part of the phrase, whereas the "Occam" part comes from the Fourteenth-century English scholar, William of Occam (or Ockham) who popularized this point of view in a phrase which goes: "Entities must not be unnecessarily multiplied."

Kapp therefore seeks a third type of hypothesis which requires no additional assumptions. This is that creation *does* take place (avoiding the paradoxes of eternal existence) but at no specific time (avoiding the paradoxes of one-shot creation). In other words, at any random point in time and at any random point in space, a particle of matter may be created—not out of energy, mind you, but out of nothing.

Of course you may ask why such a creation should take place, but there is no need to answer that question. The fact of this random creation through space and time is an assumption, but no more an assumption than the hypothesis that matter-energy always existed or that it was all created at once.

Kapp maintains that the assumption of "continuous creation" involves no subsidiary assump-

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tions to justify it and that by the "Principle of Minimum Assumption" (his alternate name for Occam's Razor) it should, at least until further notice, be accepted as the most probable description of the beginnings of the universe.

This continuous creation theory of the universe has been recently popularized by H. Bondi, Thomas Gold and, especially, Fred Hoyle, but apparently Kapp got there first. At least he published his suggestions first in 1940, while Hoyle and the others weren't in print on the subject before 1948.

The doctrine of continuous creation raises several interesting questions. First, how quickly is creation going on? At what rate is matter being created? Kapp does not commit himself but quotes an estimate by W. H. McCrea (first published in 1950) to the effect that 500 atoms of hydrogen are being formed per cubic kilometer per year.

If so, the amount of new matter is being formed at a quite imperceptible rate. To make that clear, consider that the entire volume of the earth is 1.1×10^{12} cubic kilometers, so that in a year the amount of hydrogen that would be created within the planetary body would amount to 5.5×10^{14} atoms. If we allow the earth an existence of four billion years as a solid body (even though the universe as a whole may have no specific time of origin, the earth itself undoubtedly does) and suppose it has occupied the same volume through all that time, the number of hydrogen atoms formed within the earth during its entire existence would be 2.2×10^{24}.

That's over two trillion trillion atoms, which may sound like a lot, but only comes to about 3.6 grams or less than $\frac{1}{7}$ of an ounce. I think you'll agree that this addition to the earth's mass would go unnoticed by even our best instruments working through earth's entire history.

However, the *total* amount of matter so created is enormous. Consider a sphere of space with a radius of one billion light-years (a volume that is certainly smaller than the observable universe). Its volume is about 4×10^{66} cubic kilometers and in one year, the number of hydrogen atoms formed throughout that volume is equal to 2×10^{69}. This number of hydrogen atoms can be used to form something more than a trillion suns like ours or about ten galaxies as large as our own. A process which creates enough matter for ten galaxies each year is not to be shrugged off.

But—*what* is being created? The universe is 90 percent hydrogen and most of what remains is the helium originally formed in the center of stars as a result of thermonuclear reactions. It seems reasonable that if stars weren't work-

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ing hard, the universe would consist only of hydrogen, the simplest of all atoms. Does it not seem reasonable that it is hydrogen (as McCrea implies) that is being formed?

The trouble is that the hydrogen atom is itself composite, containing one proton and one electron. Are they created separately? Does that mean there are two kinds of creation that keep in step so that just as many protons are formed as electrons.

Kapp shrugs off the issue by refusing to pinpoint the exact nature of the matter being created. I myself will run the risk of suggesting that it may be the neutron. A neutron, in the course of nature, quickly decays to produce a proton and an electron (and an anti-neutrino, which we will ignore). The protons and electrons formed from the neutrons, just about as fast as the latter are created, will associate to form hydrogen atoms.

But, and this is the point that bothers me, why should neutrons be created and not anti-neutrons? There seems to me no reason for supposing that there is a greater probability of the creation of any particle than of the corresponding anti-particle (For some words on particles and anti-particles, see my article, "The Clash of Cymbals," in the July, 1958, issue of Venture Science Fiction).

Whatever the mechanism of creation, whether hydrogen atoms are created to begin with, or neutrons, or some unknown and still more fundamental particle, it seems to me that on the basis of pure chance, matter and anti-matter should be formed in equal quantities. What's more, they should be formed randomly mixed throughout space and time. Matter and antimatter should then interact and produce a universe consisting of pure energy. Nothing in Kapp's book satisfies me as a way out of this dilemma. If the Gentle Reader thinks of one, he is welcome to write me.

But let's put that to one side and proceed.

Kapp goes on to consider the ultimate end of the universe. Again, he reduces all speculations to three possible varieties of assumption: One, that the mass-energy of the Universe will exist through all future eternity; two, that it will all come to an end at once at some specific time; three, that individual particles will cease to exist at random at any time and in any place.

Using the same sort of reasoning as before, he plumps for the third possibility, and again, I, for one, find the reasoning all-but-irresistible and feel the strong urge to go along with him.

So Kapp, having anticipated the continuous creation boys, goes beyond them by suggesting the existence of continuous extinction as

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well. The two together he calls "The Hypothesis of the Symmetrical Impermanence of Matter"; i.e., matter is impermanent in its past history and in its future history, and in the same statistical manner.

For any given particle of matter, then, it is a case of: here it comes and there it goes.

If matter is being created and extinguished constantly, there is the possibility that both processes are proceeding at equal rates so that the total matter-energy of the universe remains constant, even though the identity of individual particles is constantly changing. (We would then be living in a "steady-state universe.")

This seems unlikely, at least at the present stage of the universe's existence. The creation of a particle of matter would create an increment of space as well, while the extinction of a particle would extinguish an increment of space. (Space, in this view, is not merely an empty container into which matter is piled, but is an integral part of matter, just as mass is, coming with matter and going with it.)

Since the universe is observed to be expanding, this would seem to require that those processes that create space preponderate over the processes that extinguish it. McCrea apparently calculated the rate at which matter is created by computing the amount of space that had to be added to the universe to account for its observed rate of expansion.

If Kapp's suggestion of continuous extinction is accepted, then the hydrogen atoms being formed (according to McCrea) are not the total being formed—they merely represent the excess of creations over extinctions.

However, just as there is the question of particle/anti-particle balance which seems to me to be a weakness in the hypothesis of continuous creations, so there is a question of another sort which bothers me with respect to continuous extinction.

Kapp himself points out that it is unlikely that a single particle of a complex nucleus will be extinguished alone. That could easily render what remains of the nucleus radioactive. If (to use an example of my own) one of the neutrons of the argon-40 nucleus were to vanish suddenly, the strongly radioactive argon-39 would be formed. If, instead, one of the protons were to disappear, the even more strongly radioactive chlorine-39 should appear.

In that case, the extinction of matter in a pure sample of argon-40 should be detectable, even if it proceeds at an excessively slow rate, through the appearance of radioactivity. However, argon-40 is not detectably radioactive.

Kapp therefore concludes that the smallest particle that can be involved in the process of extinc-

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tion is the atomic nucleus, which must go poof, as a whole. If this were so, then continuous extinction could only be detected through disappearing mass, a much more difficult phenomenon to measure at micro-microlevels than is appearing radiation.

But then this means that the two hundred odd protons and neutrons (plus mesons and who knows what else) in complex nuclei such as those of mercury or uranium, must all go at once and together.

Why?

The particles come in singly, so why go out in a group? What keeps them so neatly in step? Does their close association in the nucleus make them all one particle in certain aspects? Do we not require additional assumptions here, and does this not, in view of Occam's Razor, weaken the hypothesis of continuous extinction?

I'll be glad to hear any views you may have on this, too, but meanwhile we'll let this go and once again continue onward.

Although the universe may see an overall excess of creations over extinctions, that pattern is not necessarily true for a specific small portion of the universe. Creations take place anywhere in space and time randomly, so that a cubic kilometer which is virtually empty of matter (as in intergalactic space) and a cubic kilometer which is virtually full of it (as at the center of a planet) witness creations at equal rates. Creation, in other words, is a function of volume only.

Extinctions, on the other hand, depend on particles already existing. In those regions of space where particles are almost nonexistent, there are virtually no extinctions because there is nothing to extinguish. In other regions, where particles exist cheek by jowl, there are comparatively many extinctions. In short, extinctions are a function of mass only.

Therefore, wherever much mass is compressed into comparatively small volume, as in a planet, extinctions overwhelm creations and the net effect is a local shrinkage of the universe. Where a minute mass is distributed over vast volumes, creations overwhelm extinctions and there is a local expansion of the universe. On the whole, as I've said, the expansion preponderates over the contraction.

Now, consider two galaxies which are neighbors. Between them is a vast region of space, virtually empty, in which creations of particles are proceeding at a considerably greater rate than are extinctions, so that space is expanding and the galaxies are receding from each other. (The recession is not caused by the motion of the galaxies but by the piling up of space between, if you can picture the distinction.)

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Although space comes into existence with matter and is part of it, the matter, once created, can move about in space under the influence of gravitational attraction, crowding into some portions and leaving others emptier than ever. In this case, the particles formed between the galaxies move slowly toward whichever galaxy has the stronger gravitational pull at that point in space.

However, half-way between the galaxies (assuming them to be equal in mass) there is a kind of gravitational plateau where the particles find it difficult to decide in which direction to head (something like Buridan's Ass—a literary allusion I throw in to gratify the penchant for learning on the part of the Kindly Editor).

The further apart the galaxies move, the vaster is this intermediate region in which the created particles move in either direction with excessive slowness, if at all. The result is that they begin to accumulate and after a while develop a gravitational field of their own strong enough to draw them together against the pull of the distant galaxies. The compression further strengthens the new gravitational field and the new mass now begins to attract particles on either side that otherwise would have fallen into the old galaxies.

In short, a new galaxy is formed.

Kapp calculates that the universe is expanding at such a rate that a new galaxy forms between two old neighbors after those neighbors have been mutually receding for a little over three and a half billion years. The space between the new galaxy and each of its neighbors continues to increase, and after another three and a half billion years, still newer galaxies form between it and its neighbors on all sides.

Skipping Kapp's theory of gravity (which is fascinating, but which I think I will leave for another article another day), I will pass on to that one of his conclusions which I, myself, find most startling.

In the volume occupied by any piece of dense matter, such as a gram weight or a planet, the number of extinctions far exceeds the number of creations and the mass of matter constantly decreases. Since extinctions take place on a purely random basis, as radioactive disintegrations do, the "half-life" concept holds. That is, after a fixed period of time, a given mass will have shrunk to half its original value. After the lapse of another such fixed period, the remainder will have shrunk to half what it was and so on.

Kapp deduces by several lines of reasoning that the half-life of matter is roughly 800,000,000 years, which is an astonishingly small value. It means that some

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300,000,000,000 atomic nuclei are undergoing extinction every second in your body. This isn't as bad as it sounds, of course, since the mass of that number of nuclei is less than a thirty-trillionth of an ounce and is made up without detectable effort.

However, the consequences in geology and astronomy are more drastic. Kapp suggests that a large body such as a star may make up its shrinkage by the collection of interstellar matter through gravitational attraction. For that reason a star may be undergoing only a very small net shrinkage or may even, if massive enough, be growing.

A smaller body in a star's shadow, so to speak, has little or no chance to collect matter, since the star, with its larger gravitational field, hogs the collection. The smaller body will shrink, therefore, and the smaller it is, the more closely will its rate of shrinkage approach the half-life of matter.

In fact, Kapp works up a theory of the formation of the Solar system as the result of the shrinkage of such a small companion of our sun, and maintains that what is left of that small companion is what is now called the planet, Jupiter.

The mass of Jupiter at present is just a trifle under a thousandth that of the Sun; 0.00095, to be precise. Suppose we assume that Jupiter has been shrinking at a rate corresponding to Kapp's estimated half-life of matter and that the Sun has been maintaining a constant mass. If that is so, then about eight billion years ago, Jupiter would have been just as massive as the Sun. Since Kapp's theory of the formation of the Solar system postulates a companion markedly less massive than the Sun to begin with, the Solar system must be markedly younger than eight billion years.

And so it is, in all likelihood. The most popular estimate of the age of the Solar system is five billion years, and that long ago Jupiter would have been 0.0788 (about one-thirteenth) the mass of the Sun. This is a reasonable mass for a small star.

The planets, including the earth itself, must also be shrinking. From this point of view, the earth would have shrunk considerably during geologic times.

If life began two billion years ago, it began on an earth that was 5.6 times as massive as it is today and had a diameter of about 14,000 miles. Six hundred million years ago, at a time when the earliest fossils were formed, the earth was still 1.7 times as massive as it is today and had a diameter of 9500 miles. A hundred and fifty million years ago, when the dinosaurs flourished, the earth was 1.2 times as massive as it is today and had a diameter of 8,500 miles.

And, of course, this shrinkage

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continues. In about two and a half billion years, the earth will be no more massive than present-day Mars; most of its atmosphere will be gone and most of its ocean. A dreary picture.

Of all Kapp's suggestions, I find the notion of the shrinking earth most difficult to swallow. What I would like to see is some observation that would present tangible evidence for or against such a shrinkage.

The most obvious method would be to measure the strength of the earth's gravitational field and note if it decreases slowly with time. Unfortunately, this decrease would be excessively slow. The acceleration of a falling body under standardized conditions is now 980.665 centimeters per second per second. If Kapp is correct, it will decrease to 980.663 by 2250 A.D. Three centuries is a long time to wait for a decline of one part in half a million.

However, I have thought (and I absolve Kapp of responsibility for this idea) of a way in which the question might be settled now.

If an animal doubles in dimensions, its mass (which would depend on its volume) would increase as the cube of the dimensional increase, or eight-fold. On the other hand, the strength of supporting structures (such as the bones of the limbs) would increase only as the cross-sectional area, or four-fold.

For this reason, a massive animal must have thicker legs, even in proportion to its size, than a small animal. The legs of an elephant are thicker in proportion to its body size than are the legs of a horse, which are in turn thicker than those of a mouse, which are in turn thicker than those of a mosquito.

If an animal the size and shape of a horse lived on a world with a greater gravitational attraction than Earth's it would have to have markedly thicker legs than it does now. If it lived on a world with a smaller attraction, it would have thinner legs.

Now, at the time the dinosaurs were in their prime, the earth was 1.2 times as massive as it is today, according to Kapp's theory. The fossilized bones we now have would also have been 1.2 times as massive when they were living. The gravitational attraction of earth upon dinosaur would therefore be 1.2 x 1.2 or just about 1½ times as great as we would expect it to be from today's size of the planet and the fossil. A fossil which, under present-day conditions, we would estimate to represent a dinosaur that weighed 40 tons, would really be representing one that weighed 60 tons. (In the case of the first land creatures, such as the armored amphibians of three hundred million years ago, the discrepancy would be even greater.)

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The shrinkage of the fossils ought to be perfectly even, maintaining all bone or shell proportions as they originally were. Would it be possible for a paleontologist, then, to tell from these proportions whether the bones were more suitable to a 60-ton mass rather than to a 40-ton mass, or vice versa? It seems to me it should be, but is there a paleontologist in the house?

Of course, if the earth *is* shrinking, then I need merely wait for two hundred million years or so, to lose the thirty pounds I really need to lose. On the other hand, the loss would be in proportion everywhere in my body, so that I would maintain on a slightly smaller scale my present appearance of genial and lovable rotundity.

On the whole, then, it might not be worth hanging around two hundred million years just for that. Not unless the [lovably lean (T.K.E.)] Kindly Editor keeps me company.

Through Time And Space With Ferdinand Feghoot: XXXV

IN 3285, Ferdinand Feghoot solved the famous riddle of the *graffiti* of Amis, the Planet of Ruins.

"Imagine it!" cried his friend, Arch-Archaeologist Kingsley. "Thousands of scholars have tried to elucidate them, all in vain! Even *I* have only been able to identify the components. That stylized female figure clearly portrays the legendary Abigail Penfold, a woman from Kent in the old Earth country of England. She is said to have made a vast fortune by preserving unwanted seabirds in tins and shipping them out to space settlers, who considered them luxuries. Even today, her name is a by-word, like Hot-Dog Harry's on Earth. But it's the upper half of the thing that's driving me mad! Look! There are three lions, not heraldic at all, but just sitting there smugly, as serene as you please. Feghoot, what can they *have* to do with the old girl and her tins?"

Feghoot regarded the drawings for nearly a minute. "I believe," he declared, "that these refer to an archaic English poem."

The Arch-Archaeologist smiled condescendingly.

"I can't document it," said Ferdinand Feghoot. "I'm afraid you'll have to accept it for what my word's worth. But it's really quite simple. Those are lions, composed, above Tinned-Tern Abby."

—GRENDEL BRIARTON *(with thanks to Martin Graetz)*

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BOOKS

VENUS PLUS X, *Theodore Sturgeon, Pyramid, 35¢*
DEATHWORLD, *Harry Harrison, Bantam, 35¢*
SHADOW HAWK, *Andre Norton, Harcourt, Brace, $3.50*
AVALON BOOKS
STAR OF STARS, *Frederik Pohl, Doubleday, $3.50*
A GUIDE TO THE STARS, *Patrick Moore, W. W. Norton, $4.95*

THIS DEPARTMENT IS SO ANGRY with Theodore Sturgeon that we hesitate to review the source of our anger, his latest book, VENUS PLUS X. Claiming to be a novel, VENUS PLUS X is actually a long exploration of Mr. Sturgeon's attitude toward sex and mores in America; their foibles and furbelows, their dilemmas and disasters.

His exploration is carried out through the visit of one Charlie Johns, member of Homo Sapiens (which, with elephantine irony, Mr. Sturgeon persists in abbreviating to Homo Sap.), to the mystery super-world of Ledom, whither he has apparently been brought by time machine. While the manners and morals of Ledom are displayed, they are contrasted to life in America, slightly extrapolated into the future, and run as a parallel counter-theme written in the present tense. It's all complicated and endless.

Now it must be clearly understood that we're not being prudish about Mr. Sturgeon's preoccupation with sex. In our lurid career in the entertainment business, we've learned to accept the versions and inversions of sexual practices as mere commonplaces. The only thing about VENUS PLUS X that shocks and angers us is Mr. Sturgeon's incredible tediousness. This is unforgivable.

Mr. Sturgeon, whom we admire profoundly as one of the most brilliant and perceptive of American writers, has permitted himself to blunder into the trap that undoes so many lesser American authors . . . a deadly and stultifying seriousness about sex. On other subjects Mr. Sturgeon writes with warmth, wit, and a deft light touch; but when he dedi-

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cates himself to sex he writes like an unfrocked clinician.

DEATHWORLD, by Harry Harrison, illustrates a notion that this department has been maturing for some years; that while the science of science-fiction seems to be marking time, the fiction is moving forward rapidly. DEATHWORLD is a rousing novel based on ideas which are not particularly new, but written with finesse.

Jason dinAlt, gambler and adventurer, comes to the malignant planet Pyrrus, where an incredible struggle for survival against savage odds has produced a pioneer population of towering strength. In fact, Jason is induced to visit the planet because the power and poise of its representatives is a challenge to his manhood which he is compelled to accept.

In a series of driving action scenes, vividly written and characterized, Jason slowly unravels the mystery of the hostile ecology of Pyrrus, and fights against the obstinacy of the inhabitants to bring them around to accepting his solution of their problem. It is much to Mr. Harrison's credit as a craftsman that through all this his hero never achieves the virility of the Pyrrans, and yet remains a likable and sympathetic protagonist.

It has been reliably reported that Mr. Harrison and his publishers are planning a sequel to DEATHWORLD. We're very happy to hear this, and you will be, too, after you've read the book.

Andre Norton, a science fiction author of only mediocre attainment, finds her forte in the historical novel with SHADOW HAWK, an interesting and meticulously researched novel about the struggles of the Egyptians to drive out their Hyksos conquerors some two thousand years before the birth of Christ.

The hero is Rahotep, by birth Duke of the Hawk, but since his lands are now occupied by the Hyksos invaders, no more than a Shadow Hawk. However, Rahotep is no shadow soldier, and his campaigning and intriguing in Upper Egypt and Nubia are packed with action and violence. We have only one small criticism to make: Miss Norton was forced to compress her scholarship into too small a compass. Occasionally her details clutter up the narrative. And we have one question to raise: Can a woman really write convincing action?

It's time that we got around to Avalon Books who have faithfully submitted their publications to this department each month. So far we have received THE GREEN PLANET by J. Hunter Holly, THE SWORDSMAN OF MARS by Otis Adelbert Kline, CONQUEST OF LIFE by Adam Lukens, and HE

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OWNED THE WORLD by Charles Eric Maine.

Avalon publishes in neat, uniform editions, with attractive covers, good paper, and large type, all priced reasonably at $2.95. These are frank juveniles, perhaps a bit old fashioned for the sophisticated taste of this magazine's readers; but they're not aimed at us, they're intended for our children. We guarantee that if there's nothing in the Avalon Books which will stimulate juveniles, there's certainly nothing which will offend their parents.

Frederik Pohl, eminent author and editor, has brought together the best stories from his fine series of STAR SCIENCE FICTION STORIES in a volume entitled, appropriately enough, STAR OF STARS.

This is a must for your shelves, including, as it does, Cyril Kornbluth's "The Advent on Channel Twelve," a delicious spoof of the rise of a new faith; Fritz Leiber's engaging "Space-Time For Springers," with one of the most charming tag-lines ever written; Richard Matheson's grotesque "Dance Of The Dead," which will grip and shock you; and Jerome Bixby's "It's A Good Life," which we believe to be one of the most powerful and appalling science fiction stories ever written.

There are more by Clarke, Kuttner, Kersh, Gold, *et alia;* all arresting and entertaining. If science-fiction were to be judged solely on the evidence of one book, this might well be it.

The first book we ever bought in our life was LESSONS IN ASTRONOMY by Charles Young. This was back in 1927, and we've been buying and reading astronomy texts ever since. Latest is A GUIDE TO THE STARS by Patrick Moore, a most enjoyable book, both semi-popular and semi-technical by the author of A GUIDE TO THE MOON and A GUIDE TO THE PLANETS.

There are excellent diagrams and photographs, and useful appendices of constellations, bright stars, double stars, variable stars, and nebulae. We find A GUIDE TO THE STARS to be a pleasant adjunct to our own telescope, and we recommend it to all amateur astronomers.

But the greatest appeal of the book is Mr. Moore's characteristic English style. Somehow, American professionals never achieve the quality of writing of their English colleagues; perhaps because they don't permit themselves to intrude, which we feel is a great mistake. After all, one text is very much like another, and after you've been through a few there isn't much left to learn. All that is left is to learn to know the author, and in Mr. Moore's case you'll find that it's a rewarding acquaintanceship.

—ALFRED BESTER

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A GREAT GREY FANTASY

No need to wound
the pride of witches
with dental pumpkins and
cardboard toots one autumnal
eve each year. Why raise the
wrath of wraiths; why rile
the local spook

or banshee? Let them lie there
sucking the blood of dreams.
You stay indoors. If
your id needs its
lid lifted, flick a
knob in your parlor. You'll
hear electronic chains scrape

and rattle, see
shadows larrup the
Laramie trail and Mike
Hammer's image pound dickens
out of rubber jaws. The
Great Grey Phantom rides
again. Or, I

should say, still: Halloween has
been perpetual now
for several years.
I have been here
in my easy chair
a month myself, bewitched
(i.e., made stone) by the runes

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incanted by
fakirs of Commerce,
greatest of nether lords.
Come, I'm bloodless and it's what!
Halloween? October
already? Out, then,
out of coffins;

out on the porch for air,
zombies! The moon's full. Sniff.
What's that wail, werewolves?
No, that window,
and that one, look there,
everywhere one notes tubes
flickering, faces pasted

to squares of grey
glass and gas. The sound!
it's weird: hooves (cloven?), shots,
songs, shrieks (This Is *Your* Life) — what
a devilish din. What
are those black masses
against the moon?

Whither bound? Gad, brooms! Goblins,
ghosts, wizards, ogres! What's
that banner say? "MARS
OR BUST!" In I
go for a good view.
A Mobile Camera
Rocket's up ahead of them.

LEWIS TURCO

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A new demonstration of Poul Anderson's particular mastery of the battle tale, with a skillful blend of the drama inherent in both the vast potentials of science and the enduring qualities of human nature.

TIME LAG

by Poul Anderson

522 Anno Coloniae Conditae:

Elva was on her way back, within sight of home, when the raid came.

For nineteen thirty-hour days, riding in high forests where sunlight slanted through leaves, across ridges where grass and the first red lampflowers rippled under springtime winds, sleeping by night beneath the sky or in the hut of some woodsdweller—once, even, in a nest of Alfavala, where the wild little folk twittered in the dark and their eyes glowed at her—she had been gone. Her original departure was reluctant. Her husband of two years, her child of one, the lake and fields and chimney smoke at dusk which were now hers also, these were still too marvelous to leave.

But the Freeholder of Tervola had duties as well as rights. Once each season, he or his representative must ride circuit. Up into the mountains, through woods and deep dales, across the Lakeland as far as The Troll and then following the Swiftsmoke River south again, ran the route which Karlavi's fathers had traveled for nearly two centuries. Whether on hailu-back in spring and summer, through the scarlet and gold of fall, or by motorsled when snow had covered all trails, the Freeholder went out into his lands. Isolated farm clans, forest rangers on patrol duty, hunters and trappers and timber cruisers, brought their disputes to him as magistrate, their troubles to him as leader. Even the flitting Alfavala had learned to wait by the paths, the sick and injured trusting he could heal them, those with more complex problems struggling to put them into human words.

This year, however, Karlavi and his bailiffs were much preoccupied with a new dam across the Oulu. The old one had broken last spring, after a winter of unusually heavy

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snowfall, and 5000 hectares of bottom land were drowned. The engineers at Yuvaskula, the only city on Vaynamo, had developed a new construction process well adapted to such situations. Karlavi wanted to use this.

"But blast it all," he said, "I'll need every skilled man I have, including myself. The job has got to be finished before the ground dries, so the ferroplast can bond with the soil. And you know what the labor shortage is like around here."

"Who will ride circuit, then?" asked Elva.

"That's what I don't know." Karlavi ran a hand through his straight brown hair. He was a typical Vaynamoan, tall, light-complexioned, with high cheekbones and oblique blue eyes. He wore the working clothes usual to the Tervola district, leather breeches ending in mukluks, a mackinaw in the tartan of his family. There was nothing romantic about his appearance. Nonetheless, Elva's heart turned over when he looked at her. Even after two years.

He got out his pipe and tamped it with nervous motions. "Somebody must," he said. "Somebody with enough technical education to use a medikit and discuss people's difficulties intelligently. And with authority. We're more tradition-minded hereabouts than they are at Ruuyalka, dear. Our people wouldn't accept the judgment of just anyone. How could a servant or tenant dare settle an argument between two pioneers? It must be me, or a bailiff, or—" His voice trailed off.

Elva caught the implication. "No!" she exclaimed. "I can't! I mean . . . that is—"

"You're my wife," said Karlavi slowly. "That alone gives you the right, by well-established custom. Especially since you're the daughter of the Magnate of Ruuyalka. Almost equivalent to me in prestige, even if you do come from the other end of the continent, where they're fishers and marine farmers intead of woodsfolk." His grin flashed. "I doubt if you've yet learned what awful snobs the free yeomen of Tervola are!"

"But Hauki, I can't leave him."

"Hauki will be spoiled rotten in your absence, by an adoring nanny and a villageful of ten wives. Otherwise he'll do fine." Karlavi dismissed the thought of their son with a wry gesture. "I'm the one who'll get lonesome. Abominably so."

"Oh, darling," said Elva, utterly melted.

A few days later she rode forth.

And it had been an experience to remember. The easy, rocking motion of the six-legged hailu, the mindless leisure of kilometer after kilometer—where however the body, skin and muscle and blood and all ancient instinct, gained an aliveness such as she had never before felt; the silence of mountains

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with sunlit ice on their shoulders, then birdsong in the woods and a river brawling; the rough warm hospitality when she stayed overnight with some pioneer, the eldritch welcome at the Alfa nest—she was now glad she had encountered those things, and she hoped to know them again, often.

There had been no danger. The last violence between humans on Vaynamo (apart from occasional fist fights, caused mostly by sheer exuberance and rarely doing any harm) lay a hundred years in the past. As for storms, landslides, flood, wild animals, she had the unobtrusive attendance of Huiva and a dozen other "tame" Alfavala. Even these, the intellectul pick of their species, who had chosen to serve man in a doglike fashion rather than keep to the forests, coud speak only a few words and handle only the simplest tools. But their long ears, flat nostrils, feathery antennae, every fine green hair on every small body, were always aquiver. This was their planet, they had evolved here, and they were more animal than rational beings. Their senses and reflexes kept her safer than an armored aircraft might.

All the same, the absence of Karlavi and Hauki grew sharper each day. When finally she came to the edge of cleared land, high on the slopes of Hornback Fell, and saw Tervola below, a momentary blindness stung her eyes.

Huiva guided his hailu alongside hers. He pointed down the mountain with his tail. "Home," he chattered. "Food tonight. Snug bed."

"Yes." Elva blinked hard. *What sort of crybaby am I, anyhow?* she asked herself, half in anger. *I'm the Magnate's daughter and the Freeholder's wife, I have a University degree and a pistol-shooting medal, as a girl I sailed through hurricanes and skindove into grottos where fangfish laired, as a woman I brought a son into the world . . . I will* not *bawl!*

"Yes," she said. "Let's hurry."

She thumped heels on the hailu's ribs and started downhill at a gallop. Her long yellow hair was braided, but a lock of it broke loose, fluttering behind her. Hoofs rang on stone. Ahead stretched grainfields and pastures, still wet from winter but their shy green deepening toward summer hues, on down to the great metallic sheet of Lake Rovaniemi and then across the valley to the opposite horizon, where the High Mikkela reared into a sky as tall and blue as itself. Down by the lake clustered the village, the dear red tile of roofs, the whale shape of a processing plant, a road lined with trees leading to the Freeholder's mansion. There, old handhewn timbers glowed with sun; the many windows flung the light dazzlingly back to her.

She was halfway down the slope when Huiva screamed. She had

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learned to react fast. Thinly scattered across all Vaynamo, men could easily die from the unforeseen. Reining in, Elva snatched loose the gun at her waist. "What is it?"

Huiva cowered on his mount. One hand pointed skyward.

At first Elva could not understand. An aircraft descending above the lake . . . what was so odd about that? How else did Huiva expect the inhabitants of settlements hundreds of kilometers apart to visit each other?—And then she registered the shape. And then, realizing the distance, she knew the size of the thing.

It came down swiftly, quiet in its shimmer of antigrav fields, a cigar shape which gleamed. Elva holstered her pistol again and took forth her binoculars. Now she could see how the sleekness was interrupted with turrets and boat housings, cargo locks, viewports. An emblem was set into the armored prow, a gauntleted hand grasping a planetary orb. Nothing she had ever heard of. But—

Her heart thumped, so loudly that she could almost not hear the Alfavala's squeals of terror. "A spaceship," she breathed. "A spaceship, do you know that word? Like the ships my ancestors came here in, long ago. . . . Oh, bother! A big aircraft, Huiva. Come on!"

She whipped her hailu back into gallop. The first spaceship to arrive at Vaynamo in, in, how long? More than a hundred years. And it was landing here! At her own Tervola!

The vessel grounded just beyond the village. Its enormous mass settled deeply into the plowland. Housings opened and auxiliary aircraft darted forth, to hover and swoop. They were of a curious design, larger and blunter than the fliers built on Vaynamo. The people, running toward the marvel, surged back as hatches gaped, gangways extruded, armored cars beetled down to the ground.

Elva had not yet reached the village when the strangers opened fire.

There were no hostile ships, not even an orbital fortress. To depart, the seven craft from Chertkoi simply made rendezvous beyond the atmosphere, held a short gleeful conference by radio, and accelerated outward. Captain Bors Golyev, commanding the flotilla, stood on the bridge of the *Askol* and watched the others. The light of the yellow sun was incandescent on their flanks. Beyond lay blackness and the many stars.

His gaze wandered off among constellations which the parallax of fifteen light-years had not much altered. The galaxy was so big, he thought, so unimaginably enormous. . . . Sedes Regis was an L scrawled across heaven. Tradition claimed Old Sol lay in that direc-

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tion, a thousand parsecs away. But no one on Chertkoi was certain any longer. Golyev shrugged. Who cared?

"Gravitational field suitable for agoric drive, sir," intoned the pilot.

Golyev looked in the sternward screen. The planet called Vaynamo had dwindled, but remained a vivid shield, barred with cloud and blazoned with continents, the overall color a cool blue-green. He thought of ocherous Chertkoi, and the other planets of its system, which were not even habitable. Vaynamo was the most beautiful color he had ever seen. The two moons were also visible, like drops of liquid gold.

Automatically, his astronaut's eye checked the claims of the instruments. Was Vaynamo really far enough away for the ships to go safely into agoric? Not quite, he thought—no, wait, he'd forgotten that the planet had a five percent greater diameter than Chertkoi. "Very good," he said, and gave the necessary orders to his subordinate captains A deep hum filled air and metal and human bones. There was a momentary sense of falling, as the agoratron went into action. And then the stars began to change color and crawl weirdly across the visual field.

"All's well, sir," said the pilot. The chief engineer confirmed it over the intercom.

"Very good," repeated Golyev. He yawned and stretched elaborately. "I'm tired! That was quite a little fight we had at that last village, and I've gotten no sleep since. I'll be in my cabin. Call me if anything seems amiss."

"Yes, sir." The pilot smothered a knowing leer.

Golyev walked down the corridor, his feet slamming its metal under internal pseudogavity. Once or twice he met a crewman and accepted a salute as casually as it was given. The men of the Interplanetary Corporation didn't need to stand on ceremony. They were tried spacemen and fighters, every one of them. If they chose to wear sloppy uniforms, to lounge about off-duty cracking jokes or cracking a bottle, to treat their officers as friends rather than tyrants —so much the better. This wasn't the nice-nelly Surface Transport Corporation, or the spit-and-polish Chemical Synthesis Trust, but IP, explorer and conqueror. The ship was clean and the guns were ready. What more did you want?

Pravoyats, the captain's batman, stood outside the cabin door. He nursed a scratched cheek and a black eye. One hand rested broodingly on his sidearm. "Trouble?" inquired Golyev.

"Trouble ain't the word, sir."

"You didn't hurt her, did you?" asked Golyev sharply.

"No, sir. I heard your orders all right. Never laid a finger on her in anger. But she sure did on me. Finally I wrassled her down and

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gave her a whiff of sleepy gas. She'd'a torn the cabin apart otherwise. She's probably come out of it by now, but I'd rather not go in again to see, captain."

Golyev laughed. He was a big man, looming over Pravoyats, who was no midget. Otherwise he was a normal patron-class Chertkoian, powerfully built, with comparatively short legs and strutting gait, his features dark, snubnosed, bearded, carrying more than his share of old scars. He wore a plain green tunic, pants tucked into soft boots, gun at hip, his only sign of rank a crimson star at his throat. "I'll take care of all that from here on," he said.

"Yes, sir." Despite his wounds, the batman looked a shade envious. "Uh, you want the prod? I tell you, she's a troublemaker."

"No."

"Electric shocks don't leave any scars, captain."

"I know. But on your way, Pravoyats." Golyev opened the door, went through, and closed it behind him again.

The girl had been seated on his bunk. She stood up with a gasp. A looker, for certain. The Vaynamoan women generally seemed handsome; this one was beautiful, tall and slim, delicate face and straight nose lightly dusted with freckles. But her mouth was wide and strong, her skin suntanned, and she wore a coarse, colorful riding habit. Her exoticism was the most exciting thing: yellow hair, slant blue eyes, who'd ever heard of the like?

The tranquilizing after-effects of the gas—or else plain nervous exhaustion—kept her from attacking him. She backed against the wall and shivered. Her misery touched Golyev a little. He'd seen unhappiness elsewhere, on Imfan and Novagal and Chertkoi itself, and hadn't been bothered thereby. People who were too weak to defend themselves must expect to be made booty of. It was different, though, when someone as good-looking as this was so woebegone.

He paused on the opposite side of his desk from her, gave a soft salute, and smiled. "What's your name, my dear?"

She drew a shaken breath. Afte trying several times, she managed to speak. "I didn't think . . . anyone . . . understood my language."

"A few of us do. The hypnopede, you know." Evidently she did not. He thought a short, dry lecture might soothe her. "An invention made a few decades ago on our planet. Suppose another person and I have no language in common. We can be given a drug to accelerate our nervous systems, and then the machine flashes images on a screen and analyzes the sounds uttered by the other person. What it hears is transferred to me and impressed on the speech center of my brain, electronically. As

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the vocabulary grows, a computer in the machine figures out the structure of the whole language—semantics, grammar, and so on—and orders my own learning accordingly. That way, a few short, daily sessions make me fluent."

She touched her lips with a tongue that seemed equally parched. "I heard once . . . of some experiments at the University," she whispered. "They never got far. No reason for such a machine. Only one language on Vaynamo."

"And on Chertkoi. But we've already subjugated two other planets, one of 'em divided into hundreds of language groups. And we expect there'll be others." Golyev opened a drawer, took out a bottle and two glasses. "Care for brandy?"

He poured. "I'm Bors Golyev, an astronautical executive of the Interplanetary Corporation, commanding this scout force," he said. "Who are you?"

She didn't answer. He reached a glass toward her. "Come, now," he said, "I'm not such a bad fellow. Here, drink. To our better acquaintance."

With a convulsive movement, she struck the glass from his hand. It bounced on the floor. "Almighty Creator! No!" she yelled. "You murdered my husband!"

She stumbled to a chair, fell down in it, rested head in arms on the desk and began to weep. The spilled brandy crept across the floor toward her.

Golyev groaned. Why did he always get cases like this? Glebs Narov, now, had clapped hands on the jolliest tawny wench you could imagine, when they conquered Marsya on Imfan: delighted to be liberated from her own drab culture.

Well, he could kick this female back down among the other prisoners. But he didn't want to. He seated himself across from her, lit a cigar out of the box on his desk, and held his own glass to the light. Ruby smoldered within.

"I'm sorry," he said. "How was I to know? What's done is done. There wouldn't have been so many casualties if they'd been sensible and given up. We shot a few to prove we meant business, but then called on the rest over a loudspeaker, to yield. They didn't. For that matter, you were riding a six-legged animal out of the fields, I'm told. You came busting right *into* the fight. Why didn't you ride the other way and hide out till we left?"

"My husband was there," she said after a silence. When she raised her face, he saw it gone cold and stiff. "And our child."

"Oh? Uh, maybe we picked up the kid, at least. If you'd like to go see—"

"No," she said, toneless and yet somehow with a dim returning pride. "I got Hauki away. I rode

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straight to the mansion and got him. Then one of your fire-guns hit the roof and the house began to burn. I told Huiva to take the baby —never mind where. I said I'd follow if I could. But Karlavi was out there, fighting. I went back to the barricade. He had been killed just a few seconds before. His face was all bloody. Then your cars broke through the barricade and someone caught me. But you don't have Hauki. Or Karlavi!"

As if drained by the effort of speech, she slumped and stared into a corner, empty-eyed.

"Well," said Golyev, not quite comfortably, "your people had been warned." She didn't seem to hear him. "You never got the message? But it was telecast over your whole planet. After our first non-secret landing. That was several days ago. Where were you? Out in the woods? —Yes, we scouted telescopically, and made clandestine landings, and caught a few citizens to interrogate. But when we understood the situation, more or less, we landed openly in, uh, your city. Yuvaskula, is that the name? We seized it without too much damage, captured some officials of the planetary government, claimed the planet for IP and called on all citizens to cooperate. But they wouldn't! Why, one ambush alone cost us fifty good men. What could we do? We had to teach a lesson. We announced we'd punish a few random villages. That's more humane than bombarding from space with cobalt missiles. Isn't it? But I suppose your people didn't really believe us, the way they came swarming when we landed. Trying to parley with us first, and then trying to resist us with hunting rifles! What would you expect to happen?"

His voice seemed to fall into an echo-less well.

He loosened his collar, which felt a trifle tight, took a deep drag on his cigar and refilled his glass. "Of course, I don't expect you to see our side of it at once," he said reasonably. "You've been jogging along, isolated, for centuries, haven't you? Hardly a spaceship has touched at your planet since it was first colonized. You have none of your own, except a couple of interplanetary boats which hardly ever get used. That's what your President told me, and I believe him. Why should you go outsystem? You have everything you can use, right on your own world. The nearest sun to yours with an oxygen atmosphere planet is three parsecs off. Even with a very high-powered agoration, you'd need ten years to get there, another decade to get back. A whole generation! Sure, the time-contraction effect would keep you young—ship's time for the voyage would only be a few weeks, or less—but all your friends would be middle-aged when you came home. Believe me, it's lonely being a spaceman."

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He drank. A pleasant burning went down his throat. "No wonder man spread so slowly into space, and each colony is so isolated," he said. "Chertkoi is a mere name in your archives. And yet it's only fifteen light-years from Vaynamo. You can see our sun on any clear night. A reddish one. You call it Gamma Navarchi. Fifteen little light-years, and yet there's been no contact between our two planets for four centuries or more!

"So why now? Well, that's a long story. Let's just say Chertkoi isn't as friendly a world as Vaynamo. You'll see that for yourself. We, our ancestors, we came up the hard way, we had to struggle for everything. And now there are four billion of us! That was the census figure when I left. It'll probably be five billion when I get home. We have to have more resources. Our economy is grinding to a halt. And we can't afford economic dislocation. Not on as thin a margin as Chertkoi allows us. First we went back to the other planets of our system and worked them as much as practicable. Then we started re-exploring the nearer stars. So far we've found two useful planets. Yours is the third. You know what your population is? Ten million, your President claimed. Ten million people for a whole world of forests, plains, hills, oceans . . . why, your least continent has more natural resources than all Chertkoi. And you've stabilized at that population. You don't want more people!"

Golyev struck the desk with a thump. "If you think ten million stagnant agriculturists have a right to monopolize all that room and wealth, when four billion Chertkoians live on the verge of starvation," he said indignantly, "you can think again."

She stirred. Not looking at him, her tone small and very distant, she said, "It's our planet, to do with as we please. If you want to breed like maggots, you must take the consequences."

Anger flushed the last sympathy from Golyev. He ground out his cigar in the ashwell and tossed off his brandy. "Never mind moralizing," he said. "I'm no martyr. I became a spaceman because it's fun!"

He got up and walked around the desk to her.

538 A.C.C.:

When she couldn't stand the apartment any more, Elva went out on the balcony and looked across Dirzh until that view became unendurable in its turn.

From this height, the city had a certain grandeur. On every side it stretched horizonward, immense gray blocks among which rose an occasional spire shining with steel and glass. Eastward at the very edge of vision it ended before some mine pits, whose scaf-

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folding and chimneys did not entirely cage off a glimpse of primordial painted desert. Between the buildings went a network of elevated trafficways, some carrying robofreight, others pullulating with gray-clad clients on foot. Overhead, against a purple-black sky and the planet's single huge moon, nearly full tonight, flitted the firefly aircars of executives, engineers, military techs, and others in the patron class. A few stars were visible, but the fever-flash of neon drowned most of them. Even by full red-tinged daylight, Elva could never see all the way downward. A fog of dust, smoke, fumes and vapors, hid the bottom of the artificial mountains. She could only imagine the underground, caves and tunnels where workers of the lowest category were bred to spend their lives tending machines, and where a criminal class slunk about in armed packs.

It was rarely warm on Chertkoi, summer or winter. As the night wind gusted, Elva drew more tightly around her a mantle of genuine fur from Novagal. Bors wasn't stingy about clothes or jewels. But then, he liked to take her out in public places, where she could be admired and he envied. For the first few months she had refused to leave the apartment. He hadn't made an issue of it, only waited. In the end she gave in. Nowadays she looked forward eagerly to such times; they took her away from these walls. But of late there had been no celebrations. Bors was working too hard.

The moon Drogoi climbed higher, reddened by the hidden sun and the lower atmosphere of the city. At the zenith it would be pale copper. Once Elva had fancied the markings on it formed a death's head. They didn't really; that had just been her horror of everything Chertkoian. But she had never shaken off the impression.

She hunted among the constellations, knowing that if she found Vaynamo's sun it would hurt, but unable to stop. The air was too thick tonight, though, with an odor of acid and rotten eggs. She remembered riding out along Lake Rovaniemi, soon after her marriage. Karlavi was along: no one else, for you didn't need a bodyguard on Vaynamo. The two moons climbed fast. Their light made a trembling double bridge on the water. Trees rustled, the air smelled green, something sang with a liquid plangency, far off among moon-dappled shadows.

"But that's beautiful!" she had whispered. "Yonder songbird. We haven't anything like it in Ruuyalka."

Karlavi chuckled. "No bird at all. The Alfavala name—well, who can pronounce that? We humans say 'yanno.' A little pseudomammal, a terrible pest. Roots

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up tubers. For a while we thought we'd have to wipe out the species."

"True. Also, the Alfavala would be hurt. Insofar as they have anything like a religion, the yanno seems to be part of it, locally. Important somehow, to them, at least." Unspoken was the law under which she and he had both been raised: the green dwarfs are barely where man was, two or three million years ago on Old Earth, but they are the real natives of Vaynamo, and if we share their planet, we're bound to respect them and help them.

Once Elva had tried to explain the idea to Bors Golyev. He couldn't understand at all. If the abos occupied land men might use, why not hunt them off it? They'd make good, crafty game, wouldn't they?

"Can anything be done about the yanno?" she had asked Karlavi.

"For several generations, we fooled around with electric fences and so on. But just a few years ago, I consulted Paaska Ecological Institute and found they'd developed a wholly new approach to such problems. They can now tailor a dominant mutant gene which produces a strong distaste for Vitamin C. I suppose you know Vitamin C isn't part of native biochemistry, but occurs only in plants of Terrestrial origin. We released the mutants to breed, and every season there are fewer yanno that'll touch our crops. In another five years there'll be too few to matter."

"And they'll still sing for us." She edged her hailu closer to his. Their knees touched. He leaned over and kissed her.

Elva shivered. *I'd better go in,* she thought.

The light switched on automatically as she re-entered the living room. At least artificial illumination on Chertkoi was like home. Dwelling under different suns had not yet changed human eyes. Though in other respects, man's colonies had drifted far apart indeed. . . . The apartment had three cramped rooms, which was considered luxurious. When five billion people, more every day, grubbed their living from a planet as bleak as this, even the wealthy must do without things that were the natural right of the poorest Vaynamoan. Spaciousness, trees, grass beneath bare feet, your own house and an open sky. Of course, Chertkoi had very sophisticated amusements to offer in exchange, everything from multisensory films to live combats.

Belgoya pattered in from her offside cubicle. Elva wondered if the maidservant ever slept. "Does the mistress wish anything, please?"

"No." Elva sat down. She ought to be used to the gravity by now, she thought. How long had

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she been here? A year, more or less. She hadn't kept track of time, especially when they used an unfamiliar calendar. Denser than Vaynamo, Chertkoi exerted a ten percent greater surface pull; but that wasn't enough to matter, when you were in good physical condition. Yet she was always tired.

"No, I don't want anything." She leaned back on the couch and rubbed her eyes. The haze outside had made them sting.

"A cup of stim, perhaps, if the mistress please?" The girl bowed some more, absurdly doll-like in her uniform.

"No!" Elva shouted. "Go away!"

"I beg your pardon. I am a worm. I implore your magnanimity." Terrified, the maid crawled backward out of the room on her belly.

Elva lit a cigaret. She hadn't smoked on Vaynamo, but since coming here she'd taken it up, become a chainsmoker like most Chertkoians who could afford it. You needed something to do with your hands. The servility of clients toward patrons no longer shocked her, but rather made her think of them as faintly slimy. To be sure, one could see the reasons. Belgoya, for instance, could be fired any time and sent back to street level. Down there were a million eager applicants for her position. Elva forgot her and reached after the teleshow dials. There must be something on, something loud and full of action, something to watch, something to do with her evening.

The door opened. Elva turned about, tense with expectation. So Bors was home. And alone. If he'd brought a friend along, she would have had to go into the sleeping cubicle and merely listen. Upper-class Chertkoians didn't like women intruding on their conversation. But Bors alone meant she would have someone to talk to.

He came in, his tread showing he was also tired. He skimmed his hat into a corner and dropped his cloak on the floor. Belgoya crept forth to pick them up. As he sat down, she was there with a drink and a cigar.

Elva waited. She knew his moods. When the blunt, bearded face had lost some of its hardness, she donned a smile and stretched herself along the couch, leaning on one elbow. "You've been working yourself to death," she scolded.

He sighed. "Yeh. But the end's in view. Another week, and all the obscenity paperwork will be cleared up."

"You hope. One of your bureaucrats will probably invent nineteen more forms to fill out in quadruplicate."

"Probably."

"We never had that trouble at home. The planetary government

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was only a coordinating body with strictly limited powers. Why won't you people even consider establishing something similar?"

"You know the reasons. Five billion of them. You've got room to be an individual on Vaynamo. Golyev finished his drink and held the glass out for a refill. "By all chaos! I'm tempted to desert when we get there."

Elva lifted her brows. "That's a thought," she purred.

"Oh, you know it's impossible," he said, returning to his usual humorlessness. "Quite apart from the fact I'd be one enemy alien on an entire planet—"

"Not necessarily."

"—All right, even if I got naturalized (and who wants to become a clodhopper?) I'd have only thirty years till the Third Expedition came. I don't want to be a client in my old age. Or worse, see my children made clients."

Elva lit a second cigaret from the stub of the first. She drew in the smoke hard enough to hollow her cheeks.

But it's all right to be launching the Second Expedition and make clients of others, she thought. *The First, that captured me and a thousand more (What's become of them? How many are dead, how many found useless and sent lobotomized to the mines, how many are still being pumped dry of information?) . . . that was a mere scouting trip. The Second will have fifty warships, and try to force surrender. At the very least, it will flatten all possible defenses, destroy all imaginable war potential, bring back a whole herd of slaves. And then the Third, a thousand ships or more, will bring the final conquests, the garrisons, the overseers and entrepreneurs and colonists. But that won't be for forty-five Vaynamo years or better from tonight. A man on Vaynamo . . . Hauki . . . a man who survives the coming of the Second Expedition will have thirty-odd years left in which to be free. But will he dare have children?*

"I'll settle down there after the Third Expedition, I think," Golyev admitted. "From what I saw of the planet last time, I believe I'd like it. And the opportunities are unlimited. A whole world waiting to be properly developed!"

"I could show you a great many chances you'd otherwise overlook," insinuated Elva.

Golyev shifted position. "Let's not go into that again," he said. "You know I can't take you along."

"You're the fleet commander, aren't you?"

"Yes, I will be, but curse it, can't you understand? The IP is not like any other corporation. We use men who think and act on their own, not planet-hugging morons like what's-her-name—" He jerked a thumb at Belgoya, who lowered her eyes meekly and con-

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tinued mixing him a third drink. "Men of patron status, younger sons of executives and engineers. The officers can't have special privileges. It'd ruin morale."

Elva fluttered her lashes. "Not that much. Really."

"My oldest boy's promised to take care of you. He's not such a bad fellow as you seem to think. You only have to go along with his whims. I'll see you again, in thirty years."

"When I'm gray and wrinkled. Why not kick me out in the streets and be done?"

"You know why!" he said ferociously. "You're the first woman I could ever talk to. No, I'm not bored with you! But—"

"If you really cared for me—"

"What kind of idiot do you take me for? I know you're planning to sneak away to your own people, once we've landed."

Elva tossed her head, haughtily. "Well! If you believe that of me, there's nothing more to say."

"Aw, now, sweetling, don't take that attitude." He reached out a hand to lay on her arm. She withdrew to the far end of the couch. He looked baffled.

"Another thing," he argued. "If you care about your planet at all, as I suppose you do, even if you've now seen what a bunch of petrified mudsuckers they are . . . remember, what we'll have to do there won't be pretty."

"First you call me a traitor," she flared, "and now you say I'm gutless!"

"Hoy, wait a minute—"

"Go on, beat me. I can't stop you. You're brave enough for that."

"I never—"

In the end, he yielded.

553 A.C.C.:

The missile which landed on Yuvaskula had a ten-kilometer radius of total destruction. Thus most of the city went up in one radioactive fire-gout. In a way, the thought of men and women and little children with pet kittens, incinerated, made a trifle less pain in Elva than knowing the Old Town was gone: the cabin raised by the first men to land on Vaynamo, the ancient church of St. Yarvi with its stained glass windows and gilded belltower, the Museum of Art where she went as a girl on entranced visits, the University where she studied and where she met Karlavi —*I'm a true daughter of Vaynamo,* she thought with remorse. *Whatever is traditional, full of memories, whatever has been looked at and been done by all the generations before me, I hold dear. The Chertkoians don't care. They haven't any past worth remembering.*

Flames painted the northern sky red, even at this distance, as she walked among the plastishelters of the advanced base. She had flown within a hundred kilometers, using an aircar borrowed from the

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flagship, then landed to avoid possible missiles and hitched a ride here on a supply truck. The Chertkoian enlisted men aboard had been delighted until she showed them her pass, signed by Commander Golyev himself. Then they became cringingly respectful.

The pass was supposed to let her move freely about only in the rear areas, and she'd had enough trouble wheedling it from Bors. But no one thereafter looked closely at it. She herself was so unused to the concept of war that she didn't stop to wonder at such lax security measures. Had she done so, she would have realized Chertkoi had never developed anything better, never having faced an enemy of comparable strength. Vaynamo certainly wasn't, even though the planet was proving a hard-shelled opponent, with every farmhouse a potential arsenal and every forest road a possible death trap. Guerrilla fighters hindered the movements of an invader with armor, atomic artillery, complete control of air and space; they could not stop him.

Elva drew her dark mantle more tightly about her and crouched under a gun emplacement. A sentry went by, his helmet square against the beloved familiar face of a moon, his rifle aslant across the stars. She didn't want needless questioning. For a moment the distant blaze sprang higher, unrestful ruddy light touched her, she was afraid she had been observed. But the man continued his round.

From the air she had seen that the fire was mostly a burning forest, kindled from Yuvaskula. Those wooden houses not blown apart by the missile, stood unharmed in whitest glow. Some process must have been developed at one of the research institutes, for indurating timber, since she left. . . . How Bors would laugh if she told him! An industry which turned out a bare minimum of vehicles, farm machinery, tools, chemicals; a science which developed fireproofing techniques and traced out ecological chains; a population which deliberately held itself static, so as to preserve its old customs and laws—presuming to make war on Chertkoi!

Even so, he was too experienced a fighter to dismiss any foe as weak without careful examination. He had been excited enough about one thing to mention it to Elva—a prisoner taken in a skirmish near Yuvaskula, when he still hoped to capture the city intact: an officer, who cracked just enough under interrogation to indicate he knew something important. But Golyev couldn't wait around for the inquisitors to finish their work. He must go out the very next day to oversee the battle for Lempo Machine Tool Works, and Elva knew he wouldn't return soon. The plant had been constructed underground

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as an economy measure, and to preserve the green parkscape above. Now its concrete warrens proved highly defensible, and were being bitterly contested. The Chertkoians meant to seize it, so they could be sure of demolishing everything. They would not leave Vaynamo any nucleus of industry. After all, the planet would have thirty-odd years to recover and rearm itself against the Third Expedition.

Left alone by Bors, Elva took an aircar and slipped off to the advanced base.

She recognized the plastishelter she wanted by its Intelligence insignia. The guard outside aimed a rifle at her. "Halt!" His boyish voice cracked over with nervousness. More than one sentry had been found in the morning with his throat cut.

"It's all right," she told him. "I'm to see the prisoner Ivalo."

"The gooze officer?" He flashed a pencil-thin beam across her face. "But you're a—uh—"

"A Vaynamoan myself. Of course. There are a few of us along, you know. Prisoners taken last time, who've enlisted in your cause as guides and spies. You must have heard of me. I'm Elva, Commander Golyev's lady."

"Oh. Yes, mistress. Sure I have."

"Here's my pass."

He squinted at it uneasily. "But, uh, may I ask what, uh, what *you* figure to do? I've got strict orders —"

Elva gave him her most confidential smile. "My own patron had the idea. The prisoner is withholding valuable information. He has been treated roughly, but resisted. Now, all at once, we'll take the pressure off. An attractive woman of his own race. . . ."

"I get it. Maybe he will crack. I dunno, though, mistress. These slant-eyed towheads are mean animals—begging your pardon! Go right on in. Holler if he gets rough or, or anything."

The door was unlocked for her. Elva went on through, into a hemicylindrical room so low that she must stoop. A lighting tube switched on, showing a pallet laid across the floor.

Captain Ivalo was gray at the temples, but still tough and supple. His face had gone haggard, sunken eyes and a stubble of beard; his garments were torn and filthy. When he looked up, coming awake, he was too exhausted to show much surprise. "What now?" he said in dull Chertkoian. "What are you going to try next?"

Elva answered in Vaynamoan (Oh, God, it was a year and a half, her own time, nearly seventeen years cosmic time, since she had uttered a word to anyone from her planet!): "Be quiet. I beg you. We mustn't be suspected."

He sat up. "Who are you?" he snapped. His own Vaynamoan ac-

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cent was faintly pedantic; he must be a teacher or scientist in that peacetime life which now seemed so distant. "A collaborator? I understand there are some. Every barrel must hold a few rotten apples, I suppose."

She sat down on the floor near him, hugged her knees and stared at the curving wall. "I don't know what to call myself," she said tonelessly. "I'm with them, yes. But they captured me the last time."

He whistled, a soft note. One hand reached out, not altogether steady and stopping short of touching her. "I was young then," he said. "But I remember. Do I know your family?"

"Maybe. I'm Elva, daughter of Byarmo, the Magnate of Ruuyalka. My husband was Karlavi, the Freeholder of Tervola." Suddenly she couldn't stay controlled. She grasped his arm so hard that her nails drew blood. "Do you know what became of my son? His name was Hauki. I got him away, in care of an Alfa servant. Hauki, Karlavi's son, Freeholder of Tervola. Do you know?"

He disengaged himself as gently as possible and shook his head. "I'm sorry. I've heard of both places, but only as names. I'm from the Aakinen Islands myself."

Her head dropped.

"Ivalo is my name," he said clumsily.

"I know."

"What?"

"Listen." She raised her eyes to his. They were quite dry. "I've been told you have important information."

He bridled. "If you think—"

"No. Please listen. Here." She fumbled in a pocket of her gown. At last her fingers closed on the vial She held it out to him. "An antiseptic. But the label says it's very poisonous if taken internally. I brought it for you."

He stared at her for a long while.

"It's all I can do," she mumbled, looking away again.

He took the bottle and turned it over and over in his hands. The night grew silent around them.

Finally he asked, "Won't you suffer for this?"

"Not too much."

"Wait. . . . If you could get in here, you can surely escape completely. Our troops can't be far off. Or any farmer hereabouts will hide you."

She shook her head. "No. I'll stay with them. Maybe I can help in some other small way. What else has there been to keep me alive, but the hope of—It wouldn't be any better, living here, if we're all conquered. There's to be a final attack, three decades hence. Do you know that?"

"Yes. Our side takes prisoners too, and quizzes them. The first episode puzzled us. Many thought it had only been a raid by—what's the word?—by pirates. But now we

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know they really do intend to take our planet away."

"You must have developed some good linguists," she said, seeking impersonality. "To be able to talk with your prisoners. Of course, you yourself, after capture, could be educated by the hypnopede."

"The what?"

"The language-teaching machine."

"Oh, yes, the enemy do have them, don't they? But we do too. After the first raid, those who thought there was a danger the aliens might come back set about developing such machines. I knew Chertkoian weeks before my own capture."

"I wish I could help you escape," she said desolately. "But I don't see how. That bottle is all I can do. Isn't it?"

"Yes." He regarded the thing with a fascination.

"My patron . . . Golyev himself—said his men would rip you open to get your knowledge. So I thought—"

"You're very kind." Ivalo grimaced, as if he had tasted something foul. "But your act may turn out pointless. I don't know anything useful. I wasn't even sworn to secrecy about what I do know. Why've I held out, then? Don't ask me. Stubbornness. Anger. Or just hating to admit my people—our people, damn it!—that they could be so weak and foolish."

"What?"

"They could win the war at a stroke," he said. "They won't. They'd rather die, and let their children be enslaved by the Third Expedition."

"What do you *mean?*" She crouched to hands and knees.

He shrugged. "I told you, a number of people on Vaynamo took the previous invasion at its word, that it was the vanguard of a conquering army. There was no official action. How could there be, with a government as feeble as ours? But some of the research biologists—"

"Not a plague!"

"Yes. Mutated from the local paracoryzoid virus. Incubation period, approximately one month, during which time it's contagious. Vaccination is still effective two weeks after exposure, so all our population could be safeguarded. But the Chertkoians would take the disease back with them. Estimated deaths, ninety percent of the race."

"But—"

"That's where the government did step in," he said with bitterness. "The information was suppressed. The virus cultures were destroyed. The theory was, even to save ourselves we couldn't do such a thing."

Elva felt the tautness leave her. She sagged. She had seen small children on Chertkoi too.

"They're right, of course," she said wearily.

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"Perhaps. Perhaps. And yet we'll be overrun and butchered, or reduced to serfdom. Won't we? Our forests will be cut down, our mines gutted, our poor Alfavala exterminated. . . . To hell with it." Ivalo gazed at the poison vial. "I don't have any scientific data, I'm not a virologist. It can't do any military harm to tell the Chertkoians. But I've seen what they've done to us. I would give them the sickness."

"I wouldn't." Elva bit her lip.

He regarded her for a long time. "Won't you escape? Never mind being a planetary heroine. There's nothing you can do. The invaders will go home when they've wrecked all our industry. They won't come again for thirty years. You can be free most of your life."

"You forget," she said, "that if I leave with them, and come back, the time for me will only have been one or two years." She sighed. "I can't help make ready for the next battle. I'm just a woman. Untrained. While maybe . . . oh, if nothing else, there'll be more Vaynamoan prisoners brought to Chertkoi. I have a tiny bit of influence. Maybe I can help them."

Ivalo considered the poison. "I was about to use this anyway," he muttered. "I didn't think staying alive was worth the trouble. But now—if you can—No." He gave the vial back to her. "I thank you, my lady."

"I have an idea," she said, with a hint of vigor in her voice. "Go ahead and tell them what you know. Pretend I talked you into it. Then I might be able to get you exchanged. It's barely possible."

"Oh, perhaps," he said.

She rose to go. "If you are set free," she stammered, "will you make a visit to Tervola? Will you find Hauki, Karvali's son, and tell him you saw me? If he's alive."

569 A.C.C.:

Dirzh had changed while the ships were away. The evolution continued after their return. The city grew bigger, smokier, uglier. More people each year dropped from client status, went underground and joined the gangs. Occasionally, these days, the noise and vibration of pitched battles down in the tunnels could be detected up on patron level. The desert could no longer be seen, even from the highest towers, only the abandoned mine and the slag mountains, in process of conversion to tenements. The carcinogenic murkiness crept upward until it could be smelled on the most elite balconies. Teleshows got noisier and nakeder, to compete with live performances, which were now offering more elaborate bloodlettings than old-fashioned combats. The news from space was of a revolt suppressed on Novagal, resulting in such an acute labor shortage that workers were drafted from Imfan and shipped thither.

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Only when you looked at the zenith was there no apparent change. The daylit sky was still cold purplish-blue, with an occasional yellow dustcloud. At night there were still the stars, and a skull.

And yet, thought Elva, you wouldn't need a large telescope to see the Third Expedition fleet in orbit—eleven hundred spacecraft, the unarmed ones loaded with troops and equipment, nearly the whole strength of Chertkoi marshalling to conquer Vaynamo. Campaigning across interstellar distances wasn't easy. You couldn't send home for supplies or reinforcements. You broke the enemy or he broke you. Fleet Admiral Bors Golyev did not intend to be broken.

He did not even plan to go home with news of a successful probing operation or a successful raid. The Third Expedition was to be final. And he must allow for the Vaynamoans having had a generation in which to recuperate. He'd smashed their industry, but if they were really determined, they could have rebuilt. No doubt a space fleet of some kind would be waiting to oppose him.

He knew it couldn't be of comparable power. Ten million people, forced to recreate all their mines and furnaces and factories before they could lay the keel of a single boat, had no possibility of matching the concerted efforts of six-and-a-half billion whose world had been continuously industrialized for centuries, and who could draw on the resources of two subject planets. Sheer mathematics ruled it out. But the ten million could accomplish something; and nuclear-fusion missiles were to some degree an equalizer. Therefore Bors Golyev asked for so much strength that the greatest conceivable enemy force would be swamped. And he got it.

Elva leaned on the balcony rail. A chill wind fluttered her gown about her, so that the rainbow hues rippled and ran into each other. She had to admit the fabric was lovely. Bors tried hard to please her. (Though why must he mention the price?) He was so childishly happy himself, at his accomplishments, at his new eminence, at the eight-room apartment which he now rated on the very heights of the Lebedan Tower.

"Not that we'll be here long," he had said, after they first explored its mechanized intricacies. "My son Nivko has done good work in the home office. That's how come I got this command; experience alone wasn't enough. Of course, he'll expect me to help along his sons. . . . But anyhow, the Third Expedition can go even sooner than I'd hoped. Just a few months, and we're on our way!"

"We?" murmured Elva.

"You do want to come?"

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"The last voyage, you weren't so eager."

"Uh, yes. I did have a deuce of a time, too, getting you aboard. But this'll be different. First, I've got so much rank I'm beyond criticism, even beyond jealousy. And second—well, you count too. You're not any picked-up native female. You're Elva! The girl who on her own hook got that fellow Ivalo to confess."

She turned her head slightly, regarding him sideways from droop-lidded blue eyes. Under the ruddy sun, her yellow hair turned to raw gold. "I should think the news would have alarmed them, here on Chertkoi," she said. "Being told that they nearly brought about their own extinction. I wonder that they dare launch another attack."

Golyev grinned. "You should have heard the ruckus. Some Directors did vote to keep hands off Vaynamo. Others wanted to sterilize the whole planet with cobalt missiles. But I talked 'em around. Once we've beaten the fleet and occupied the planet, its whole population will be hostage for good behavior. We'll make examples of the first few goozes who give us trouble of any sort. Then they'll know we mean what we say when we announce our policy. At the first suspicion of plague among us, we'll lay waste a continent. If the suspicion is confirmed, we'll bombard the whole works. No, there will not be any bug warfare."

"I know. I've heard your line of reasoning before. About five hundred times, in fact."

"Destruction! Am I really that much of a bore?" He came up behind her and laid his hands on her shoulders. "I don't mean to be. Honest. I'm not used to talking to women, that's all."

"And I'm not used to being shut away like a prize goldfish, except when you want to exhibit me," she said sharply.

He kissed her neck. His whiskers tickled. "It'll be different on Vaynamo. When we're settled down. I'll be governor of the planet. The Directorate has as good as promised me. Then I can do as I want. And so can you."

"I doubt that! Why should I believe anything you say? When I told you I'd made Ivalo talk by promising you would exchange him, you wouldn't keep the promise." She tried to wriggle free, but his grip was too strong. She contented herself with going rigid. "Now, when I tell you the prisoners we brought back this time are to be treated like human beings, you whine about your damned Directorate—"

"But the Directorate makes policy!"

"You're the Fleet Admiral, as you never lose a chance to remind me. You can certainly bring pressure to bear. You can insist the Vaynamoans be taken out of those

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kennels and given honorable detention—"

"Awww, now." His lips nibbled along her cheek. She turned her head away and continued:

"—and you can get what you insist on. They're your own prisoners, aren't they? I've listened enough to you, and your dreary officers when you brought them home. I've read books, hundreds of books. What else is there for me to do, day after day and week after week?"

"But I'm busy! I'd like to take you out, honest, but—"

"So I understand the power structure on Chertkoi just as well as you do, Bors Golyev. If not better. If you don't know how to use your own influence, then slough off some of that conceit, sit down and listen while I tell you how!"

"Well, uh, I never denied, sweetling, you've given me some useful advice from time to time."

"So listen to me! I say all the Vaynamoans you hold are to be given decent quarters, recreation, and respect. What did you capture them for, if not to get some use out of them? And the proper use is not to tiltillate yourself by kicking them around. A dog would serve that purpose better.

"Furthermore, the fleet has to carry them all back to Vaynamo."

"What? You don't know what you're talking about! The logistics is tough enough without—"

"I do so know what I'm talking about. Which is more than I can say for you. You want guides, intermediaries, puppet leaders, don't you? Not by the score, a few cowards and traitors, as you have hitherto. You need hundreds. Well, there they are, right in your hands.'

"And hating my guts," Golyev pointed out.

"Give them reasonable living conditions and they won't. Not quite so much, anyhow. Then bring them back home—a generation after they left, all their friends aged or dead, everything altered once you've conquered the planet. And let me deal with them. You'll get helpers!"

"Uh, well, uh, I'll think about it."

"You'll do something about it!" She eased her body, leaning back against the hard rubbery muscles of his chest. Her face turned upward, with a slow smile. "You're good at doing things, Bors," she said languidly.

"Oh, Elva—"

Later: "You know one thing I want to do? As soon as I'm well established in the governorship? I want to marry you. Properly and openly. Let 'em be shocked. I won't care. I want to be your husband, and the father of your kids, Elva. How's that sound? Mistress Governor General Elva Golyev of Vaynamo Planetary Province. Never thought you'd get that far in life, did you?"

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584 A.C.C.:

As they neared the end of the journey, he sent her to his cabin. An escape suit—an armored cylinder with gravity propulsors, air regenerator, food and water supplies, which she could enter in sixty seconds—occupied most of the room. "Not that I expect any trouble," he said. "But if something should happen . . . I hope you can make it down to the surface." He paused. The officers on the bridge moved quietly about their tasks; the engines droned; the distorted stars of near-light velocity framed his hard brown face. There was a thin sheen of sweat on his skin.

"I love you, you know," he finished. Quickly, he turned back to his duties. Elva went below.

Clad in a spaceman's uniform, seated on the bunk, enclosed in toning metal, she felt the inward wrench as the agoratron went off and speed was converted back to atomic mass. The cabin's private viewscreen showed stars in their proper constellations again, needle-sharp against blackness. Vaynamo was tiny and blue, still several hundred thousand kilometers remote. Elva ran fingers through her hair. The scalp beneath felt tight, and her lips were dry. A person couldn't help being afraid, she thought. Just a little afraid.

She called up the memory of Karlavi's land, where he had now lain for sixty-two years. Reeds whispered along the shores of Rovaniemi, the wind made a rippling in long grass, and it was time again for the lampflowers to blow, all down the valley. Dreamlike at the edge of vision, the snowpeaks of the High Mikkela floated in an utter blue.

I'm coming back, Karlavi, she thought.

In her screen, the nearer vessels were glinting toys, plunging through enormous emptiness. The further ones were not visible at this low magnification. Only the senses of radar, gravpulse, and less familiar creations, analyzed by whirling electrons in a computer bank, gave any approach to reality. But she could listen in on the main intercom line to the bridge if she chose, and hear those data spoken. She flipped the switch. Nothing yet, only routine reports. Had the planet's disc grown a trifle?

Have I been wrong all the time? she thought. Her heart stopped for a second.

Then: "Alert! Condition red! Alert! Condition red! Objects detected, approaching nine-thirty o'clock, fifteen degrees high. Neutrino emissions indicate nuclear engines."

"Alert! Condition yellow! Quiescent object detected in orbit about target planet, two-thirty o'clock, ten degrees low, circa 75,000 kilometers distant. Extremely massive. Repeat, quiescent.

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Low level of nuclear activity, but at bolometric temperature of ambient space. Possibly an abandoned space fortress, except for being so massive."

"Detected objects identified as space craft. Approaching with average radial velocity of 25° KPS. No evident deceleraion. Number very large, estimated at five thousand. All units small, about the mass of our scoutboats."

The gabble went on until Golyev's voice cut through: "Attention! Fleet Admiral to bridge of all units. Now hear this." Sardonically: "The opposition is making a good try. Instead of building any real ships—they could have constructed only a few, at best—they've turned out thousands of manned warboats. Their plan is obviously to cut through our formation, relying on speed, and release tracking torps in quantity. Stand by to repel. We have enough detectors, antimissiles, negafields, to overwhelm them in this department too! Once past us, the boats will need hours to decelerate and come back within decent shooting range. By that time we should be in orbit around the planet. Be alert for possible emergencies, of course. But I expect only standard operations to be necessary. Good shooting!"

Elva strained close to her screen. All at once she saw the Vaynamoan fleet, mere sparks, but a horde of them, twinkling among the stars. Closer! Her fingers strained against each other. *They* must *have some plan,* she told herself. *If I'm blown up in five minutes—I was hoping I'd get down to you, Karlavi. But if I don't, goodbye, goodbye.*

The fleets neared each other: on the one side, ponderous dreadnaughts, cruisers, auxiliary warcraft, escorting swarms of transport and engineer ships; on the opposite side, needle-thin boats whose sole armor was velocity. The guns of Chertkoi swung about, hoping for a lucky hit. At such speeds it was improbable. The fleets would interpenetrate and pass in a fractional second. The Vaynamoans could not be blasted until they came to grips near their home world. However, if a nuclear shell should find its mark now—what a blaze in heaven!

The flagship staggered.

"Engine room to bridge! What's happened?"

"Bridge to engine room! Gimme some power there! What in all destruction—?"

"*Sharyats* to *Askol! Sharyats* to *Askol!* Am thrown off course! Accelerating! What's going on?"

"Look out!"

"*Fodorev* to *Zuevots!* Look alive, you bloody fool! You'll ram us!"

Cushioned by the internal field, Elva felt only the minutest frac-

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tion of that immense velocity change. Even so, a wave of sickness went through her. She clutched at the bunk stanchion. The desk ripped from a loose mooring and crashed into the wall, which buckled. The deck split open underfoot. A roar went through the entire hull, ribs groaned as they bent, plates screamed as they sheared. A girder snapped in twain and spat sharp fragments among a gun turret crew. A section broke apart, air gushed out, a hundred men died before the sealing bulkheads could close.

After a moment, the stabilizing energies regained interior control. The images on Elva's screen steadied. She drew a shaken lungful of air and watched. Out of formation, the *Askol* plunged within a kilometer of her sister ship the *Zuevots*—just when that cyclopean hull smashed into the cruiser *Fodorev*. Fire sheeted as accumulator banks were shorted. The two giants crumpled, glowed white at the point of impact, fused, and spun off in a lunatic waltz. Men and supplies were pinwheeled from the cracks gaping in them. Two gun turrets wrapped their long barrels around each other like intertwining snakes. Then the whole mass struck a third vessel with shattering impact. Steel chunks exploded into space.

Through the noise and the human screaming, Golyev's voice blasted. "Pipe down there! Belay that! By Creation, I'll shoot the next man who whimpers! The enemy will be here in a minute. All stations, by the numbers, report."

A measure of discipline returned. These were fighting men. Instruments fingered outward, the remaining computers whirred, minds made deductive leaps, gunners returned to their posts. The Vaynamoan fleet passed through, and the universe exploded in brief pyrotechnics. Many a Chertkoian ship died then, its defenses too battered, its defenders too stunned to ward off the tracking torpedoes. But others fought back, saved themselves, and saw their enemies vanish in the distance.

Still they tumbled off course, their engines helpless to free them. Elva heard a physicist's clipped tones give the deduction from his readings. The entire fleet had been caught in a cone of gravitational force emanating from that massive object detected in orbit. Like a maelstrom of astronomical dimensions, it had snatched them from their paths. Those closest and in the most intense field strength —a fourth of the armada—had been wrecked by sheer deceleration. Now the force was drawing them down the vortex of itself.

"But that's impossible!" wailed the *Askol's* chief engineer. "A gravity attractor beam of that magnitude. . . . Admiral, it can't be

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done! The power requirements would burn out any generator in a microsecond!"

"It's being done," said Golyev harshly. "Maybe they figured out a new way to feed energy into a space distorter. Now, where are those figures on intensity? And my slide rule. . . . Yeh. The whole fleet will soon be in a field so powerful that—Well, we won't let it happen. Stand by to hit that generator with everything we've got."

"But sir . . . we must have—I don't know how many ships—close enough to it now to be within total destruction radius."

"Tough on them. Stand by. Gunnery Control, fire when ready."

And then, whispered, even though that particular line was private and none else in the ship would hear: "Elva! Are you all right down there? Elva!"

Her hands had eased their trembling enough for her to light a cigaret. She didn't speak. Let him worry. It might reduce his efficiency.

Her screen did not happen to face the vortex source, and thus did not show its destruction by the nuclear barrage. Not that that could have been registered. The instant explosion of sun-center ferocity transcended any sense, human or electronic. Down on Vaynamo surface, in broad daylight, they must have turned dazzled eyes from that brilliance. Anyone within a thousand kilometers of those warheads died, no matter how much steel and force field he had interposed. Two score Chertkoian ships were suddenly manned by corpses. Those further in were fused to lumps. Still further in, they ceased to exist, save as gas at millions of degrees temperature. The vessels already crashed on the giant station were turned into unstable isotopes, their very atoms dying.

But the station itself vanished. And Vaynamo had had the capacity to build only one such monster. The Chertkoian ships were free again.

"Admiral to all captains!" cried Golyev's lion voice. "Admiral to all captains. Let the reports wait. Clear the lines. I want every man in the fleet to hear me. Stand by for message.

"Now hear this! This is Supreme Commander Bors Golyev. We just took a rough blow, boys. The enemy had an unsuspected weapon, and cost us a lot of casualties. But we've destroyed the thing. I repeat, we blew it out of the cosmos. And I say, well done! I say also, we still have a hundred times the strength of the enemy, and he's shot his bolt. We're going on in! Were going to—"

"Alert! Condition red! Enemy boats returning. Enemy boats returning. Radial velocity circa 50

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KPS, but acceleration circa 100 G."

"What?" . .

Elva herself saw the Vaynamoan shooting stars come back into sight.

Golyev tried hard to shout down the panic of his officers. Would they stop running around like old women? The enemy had developed something else, some method of accelerating at unheard-of rates under gravitational thrust. But not by witchcraft! It could be an internal-stress compensator developed to ultimate efficiency, plus an adaptation of whatever principle was used in the attractor vortex. Or it could be a breakthrough, a totally new principle, maybe something intermediate between the agoratron and the ordinary interplanetary drive. . . . "Never mind what, you morons! They're only flocks of splinters! Kill them!"

But the armada was roiling about in blind confusion. The detectors had given mere seconds of warning, which were lost in understanding that the warning was correct and in fratically seeking to rally men already shaken. Then the splinter fleet was in among the Chertkoians. It braked its furious relative velocity with a near-instantaneous quickness for which the Chertkoian gunners and gun computers had never been prepared. However, the Vaynamoan gunners were ready. And even a boat can carry torpedoes which will annihilate a battleship.

In a thousand fiery bursts, the armada died.

Not all of it. Unarmed craft were spared, if they would surrender. Vaynamoan boarding parties freed such of their countrymen as they found. The *Askol,* under Golyev's personal command, stood off its attackers and moved doggedly outward, toward regions where it could use the agoratron to escape. The captain of a prize revealed that over a hundred Vaynamoans were aboard the flagship. So the attempt to blow it up was abandoned. Instead, a large number of boats shot dummy missiles, which kept the defense fully occupied. Meanwhile, a companion force lay alongside, cut its way through the armor, and sent men in.

The Chertkoian crew resisted. But they were grossly outnumbered and outgunned. Most died, under bullets and grenades, gas and flamethrowers. Certain holdouts, who fortified a compartment, were welded in from the outside and left to starve or capitulate, whichever they chose. Even so, the *Askol* was so big that the boarding party took several hours to gain full possession.

The door opened. Elva stood up.

At first the half-dozen men who entered seemed foreign. In a minute—she was too tired and dazed to think clearly—she understood why. They were all in blue jackets

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and trousers, a uniform. She had never before seen two Vaynamoans dressed exactly alike. *But of course they would be,* she thought in a vague fashion. *We had to build a navy, didn't we?"*

And they remained her own people. Fair skin, straight hair, high cheekbones, tilted light eyes which gleamed all the brighter through the soot of battle. And, yes, they still walked like Vaynamoans, the swinging freeman's gait and the head held high, such as she had not seen for . . . for how long? So their clothes didn't matter, nor even the guns in their hands.

Slowly, through the ringing in her ears, she realized that the combat noise had stopped.

A young man in the lead took a step in her direction. "My lady—" he began.

"Is that her for certain?" asked someone else, less gently. "Not a collaborator?"

A new man pushed his way through the squad. He was grizzled, pale from lack of sun, wearing a sleazy prisoner's coverall. But a smile touched his lips, and his bow to Elva was deep.

"This is indeed my lady of Tervola," he said. To her: "When these men released me, up in Section Fourteen, I told them we'd probably find you here. I am so glad."

She needed a while to recognize him. "Oh. Yes." Her head felt heavy. It was all she could do to nod. "Captain Ivalo. I hope you're all right."

"I am, thanks to you, my lady. Someday we'll know how many hundreds of us are alive and sane —and here!—because of you."

The squad leader made another step forward, sheathed his machine pistol and lifted both hands toward her. He was a well-knit, good-looking man, blond-of hair, a little older than she: in his mid-thirties, perhaps. He tried to speak, but no words came out, and then Ivalo drew him back.

"In a moment," said the ex-captive. "Let's first take care of the unpleasant business."

The leader hesitated, then, with a grimace, agreed. Two men shoved Bors Golyev. The admiral dripped blood from a dozen wounds and stumbled in his weariness. But when he saw Elva, he seemed to regain himself. "You weren't hurt," he breathed. "I was so afraid . . ."

Ivalo said like steel: "I've explained the facts of this case to the squad officer here, as well as his immediate superior. I'm sure you'll join us in our wish not to be inhumane, my lady. And yet a criminal trial in the regular courts would publicize matters best forgotten and could give this man only a limited punishment. So we, here and now, under the conditions of war and in view of your high services—"

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The squad officer interrupted. He was white about the nostrils. "Anything you order, my lady," he said. "You pass the sentence. We'll execute it at once."

"Elva," whispered Golyev.

She stared at him, remembering fire and enslavements and a certain man dead on a barricade. Everything seemed distant, not quite real.

"There's been too much suffering already," she said.

She pondered a few seconds. "Just take him out and shoot him."

The officer looked relieved. He led his men forth. Golyev started to speak, but was hustled away too fast.

Ivalo remained in the cabin. "My lady—" he began, slow and awkward.

"Yes?" As her weariness overwhelmed her, Elva sat down again on the bunk. She fumbled for a cigaret. There was no emotion in her, only a dull wish for sleep.

"I've wondered. . . . Don't answer this if you don't want to. You've been through so much."

"That's all right," she said mechanically. "The trouble is over now, isn't it? I mean, we mustn't let the past obsess us."

"Of course. Uh, they tell me Vaynamo hasn't changed much. The defense effort was bound to affect society somewhat, but they've tried to minimize that, and succeeded. Our culture has a built-in stability, you know, a negative planet of those devils. Liberate their slave worlds and make certain they can't ever try afresh. But that shouldn't be difficult.

"As for you, I inquired very carefully on your behalf. Tervola remains in your family. The land and the people are as you remember."

She closed her eyes, feeling the first thaw within herself. "Now I can sleep," she told him.

Remembering, she looked up with a touch of startlement. "But you had a question for me, Ivalo?"

"Yes. All this time, I couldn't help wondering. Why you stayed with the enemy. You could have escaped. Did you know all the while how great a service you were going to do?"

Her own smile was astonishing to her. "Well, I knew I couldn't be much use on Vaynamo," she said. "Could I? There was a chance I could help on Chertkoi. But I wasn't being brave. The worst had already happened to me. Now I need only wait . . . a matter of months only, my time . . . and everything bad would be over. Whereas—well, if I'd escaped from the Second Expedition, I'd have lived most of my life in the shadow of the Third. Please don't make a fuss about me. I was actually an awful coward."

His jaw dropped. "You mean you knew we'd win? But you couldn't have! Everything pointed the other way!"

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The nightmare was fading more rapidly than she had dared hope. She shook her head, still smiling, not triumphant but glad to speak the knowledge which had kept her alive. "You're being unfair to our people. As unfair as the Chertkoians were. They thought that because we preferred social stability and room to breathe, we must be stagnant. They forgot you can have bigger adventures in, in the spirit, than in all the physical universe. We really did have a very powerful science and technology. It was oriented toward life, toward beautifying and improving instead of exploiting nature. But it wasn't less virile for that. Was it?"

"But we had no industry to speak of. We don't even now."

"I wasn't counting on our factories, I said, but on our science. When you told me about that horrible virus weapon being suppressed, you confirmed my hopes. We aren't saints. Our government wouldn't have been quite so quick to get rid of those plagues—would at least have tried to bluff with them—if there weren't something better in prospect. Wouldn't it?

"I couldn't even guess what our scientists might develop, given two generations which the enemy did not have. I did think they would probably have to use physics rather than biology. And why not? You can't have an advanced chemical, medical, genetic, ecological technology without knowing all the physics there is to know. Can you? Quantum theory explains mutations. But it also explains atomic reactions, or whatever they used in those new machines.

"Oh, yes, Ivalo, I felt sure we'd win. All I had to do myself was work to get us prisoners—especially me, to be quite honest—get us all there at the victory."

He looked at her with awe. Somehow that brought back the heaviness in her. *After all,* she thought . . . *sixty-two years. Tervola abides. But who will know me? I am going to be so much alone.*

Boots rang on metal. The young squad leader stepped forward again. "That's that," he said. His bleakness vanished and he edged closer to Elva, softly, almost timidly.

"I trust," said Ivalo with a rich, growing pleasure in his voice, "that my lady will permit me to visit her from time to time."

"I hope you will!" she murmured.

"We temporal castaways are bound to be disoriented for a while," he said. "We must help each other. You, for example, may have some trouble adjusting to the fact that your son Hauki, the Freeholder of Tervola—"

"Hauki!" She sprang to her feet. The cabin blurred around her.

"—is now a vigorous elderly

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man who looks back on a most successful life," said Ivalo. "Which includes the begetting of Karlavi here." Her grandson's strong hands closed about her own. "Who in turn," finished Ivalo, "is the recent father of a bouncing baby boy named Hauki. And all your people are waiting to welcome you home!"

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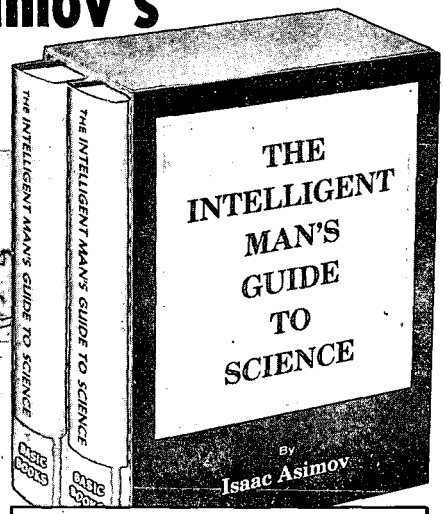
THE INTELLIGENT MAN'S GUIDE TO SCIENCE
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THE INTELLIGENT MAN'S GUIDE TO SCIENCE
By
Isaac Asimov

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